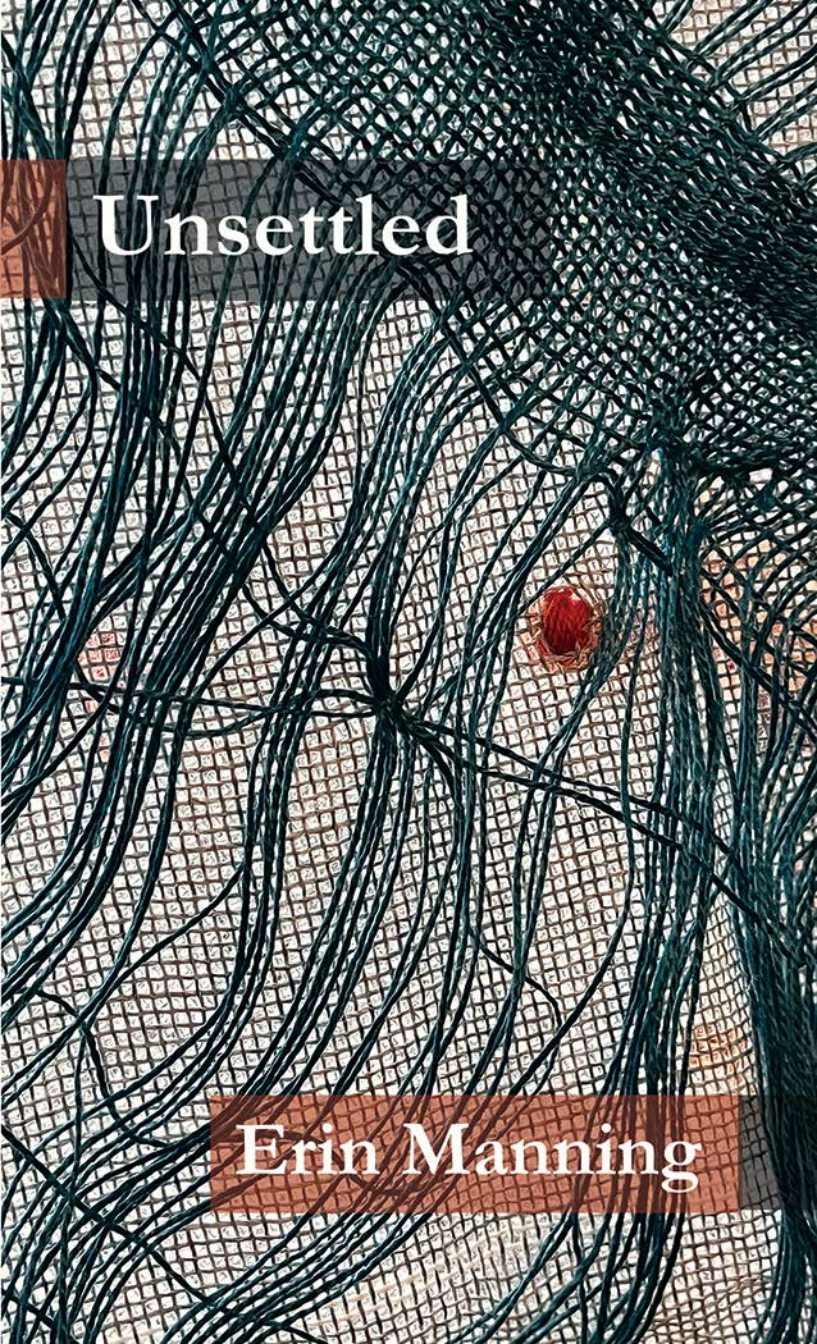
Unsettled
Erin Manning

Explores what it means to be claimed, not just by blood, but by history, land, and the fragile web of human connection.

To belong is never a simple matter. For Erin Manning, ancestry has always been more of an entanglement than a strict lineage: a collection of stories, fabulations, and echoes of the past. *Unsettled* is a deeply personal and philosophical exploration of ancestry, identity, and belonging, particularly within the context of Québec's settler-colonial history and its complex relationship with Indigeneity.

Here Manning describes her relationship with a close friend, R., who has lived a life shaped by poverty, subsistence farming, and a profound connection with the land. When R.'s mother bequeaths him their family land, he is left to navigate the tensions of inheritance, loss, and belonging. In an attempt to connect to R.'s Indigenous background, Manning offers to trace his genealogy. Soon, questions of what it means to "bestow" Indigeneity from an ancestral perspective begin to loom. Manning explores and critiques the practice of usurping Indigeneity in Québec, where claims of Métis ancestry are often leveraged for social or political gain, ultimately reinforcing whiteness and colonial structures rather than dismantling them. Through the lens of personal relationships, historical analysis, and philosophical inquiry, *Unsettled* challenges conventional notions of ancestry, property, and identity, while advocating for relational belonging over bloodline essentialism.

"We humans need guiding narratives to name the world we want to become. Making a different world requires different stories. Erin Manning's *Unsettled* steps beyond insatiable settler mythologies of self-making, beyond shame for their collective entitlement, and into the literal in-the-dirt work of uprooting white possessiveness." – Kim TallBear, Professor of Indigenous Peoples, Technoscience, and Society at the University of Alberta

"*Unsettled* is an incisive, layered and extraordinary work demanded by the complex ethical demands of social relations in our times. Some will find the pages useful to rip out and position under kindling as fire-starter. It will likely start other kinds of fires as well..." – Peter Kulchyski, Professor of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba

minor compositions

Pour Rémi (1971–2025)

It turns out you have to buy your ancestors.

I have never been much interested in the question of ancestry, not interested enough, at least, to inquire into my own extended genealogy. What I know suffices. I enjoy the apocryphal edges, almost-knowing "where I come from," like the story that my great-grandparents on the Montreuil side partook in séances with one of my favourite authors, William James. I love that there was a correspondence between James and my great-grandmother, Anna Montreuil (born Brodeur) where they discussed her award-winning novel, *Dumb-Bell* (1929), a conduit I can't help thinking I extend through my own engagement with James. And I can't help reading into the neurodiversity of the main character in that novel, amazed that our concerns could connect us across the breach of time.

Anna was an unusual woman. A novelist and nonfiction writer,[1] a translator for the Québec Department of Highways, a mother of

1 Anna Montreuil, born Brodeur, won the Québec Literary Competition Award for her first and only novel, *Dumb-Bell* (1929). In 1955 she published an account of three women who founded Québec institutions – the first school, the first hospital and the first cloister: *Three Came with Gifts.* She translated widely for the government, and worked on translations for plays both in Canada and in the United States.

five children, she was also, by all accounts, a psychic. The story goes that the very moment my father had a terrible skiing accident in the Canadian west, she called my grandmother Rachel to let her know, a call that probably saved my father's leg as it allowed the family to rally and get him the help he needed. Or the story of my great-grandfather Lorenzo Montreuil, on the same side, being ex-communicated by the Catholic Church for his and Anna's relationship to spiritualists like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

There is also my great-aunt Claire Martin, whose powerful novels, *Dans un Gant de Fer – Joue Gauche* and *Joue Droite* are not only testaments to the violence of the Catholic Church in Québec but also to the violent undertones of her own family, and mine by extension.[2] The novels, for which she won the Governor General's award in 1966 are often categorized as amongst the first explicitly feminist novels in Québec. Having

2 "Very small, we learned, I don't know how but we learned, that in these circumstances you had to pretend not to see, not to hear, not to cry, not to scream. But tyrants all suffer, in their systems, of the same weakness; they can't stop the tyranized from thinking. I was three and a half." (my translation). https://www.comettant.com/montreuil-exploration-1901/par-sa-fille-claire-martin/.

been forced to go to Catholic schools despite not being baptized, and having suffered terrible bullying because of it, I've often had inner conversations with her about the violence of the Catholic Church, about the abuse so many suffered, including my father, at the hands of priests. I've also wondered about the currents of family violence and admired her courage. But engaging more deeply into the ancestry itself never tempted me. These folks are all more interesting in my imagination than they are on paper, and in any case, I've never much connected to the idea of biological family. We are made in so many ways, by so many worlds. So when I found myself populating my genealogy on *myheritage.com*, building on trees other distant relatives have carefully maintained over years, I felt more like a voyeur than a participant in its abstract lineage.

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My Montreuil side of the family were upper middle class and well-educated. From them, I learned to police my language: I would get in trouble for speaking too "Québécois," using local dialect (joual). Being respectably French ("Radio-Canada French") was very important:

my grandmother often criticized me for speaking "below" my class. The Manning side were the "below" class. Hailing from Ireland in the 1800s, they were poorer peasant-stock whose language was that of the fields and the forests, in full local slang.

I grew up in this interstice, shifting my language depending on where I was. But from very early on, despite French being my mother tongue, and my ease shifting between different dialects (including, pinching my nose, speaking "French French"), people would often switch to English once they heard my name. Erin Manning just doesn't sound francophone.

To be recognized as truly belonging in Québec, to be "pure laine," you need to come from that early colonial stock known as the "Filles du Roy," young single women sent by King Louis XIV to populate New France between 1663 and 1673. These 800 or so "daughters of the king" were each given one-hundred pounds, thirty for their marriage trousseau, ten for recruitment fees, and sixty for the passage from France to New France. They came from de la Rochelle, de Rouen and Paris and were mainly orphans, between sixteen and forty years old. Upon arrival, they were fed and housed, and encouraged to marry

quickly. Many of them struggled, unprepared for the harsh climate, and yet lore tells us that they lived up to the challenge: "the Canadian environment, richer in food resources and with its low density of population, permitted them to have many children and to live longer than their cousins who remained in France."[3] I have no such lineage. But had my name been Irène Montreuil, I could have faked it.

As it were, my Irish name irrevocably situates me on the Irish side, despite my having no direct connection to Ireland, and despite it being very common to have an Irish name in Québec. Like many with those Irish names, it's likely my Manning side didn't speak English fluently, if at all. And yet I am assumed to be from "the other side." The reason my name has set me apart from my Québecois "roots" my whole life is complex, and to understand it, one has to connect to the myths of origin that sustain Québec's settler imaginary.

Two interrelated aspects of Québec nationalism will make sense of why my "Irishness" has always stood out. The first, already mentioned, is the focus on the concept of "pure laine," or

3 https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/fr/article/filles-du-roi.

"old stock" – those in Québec who can trace their ancestry back to the Filles du Roy. Pure laine is what the Filles du Roy were for: to make sure the lineage would remain French instead of being diluted by intermarriage with First Nations. The second, and interrelated factor, is a question of language. While I have only ever spoken French with my family members, including my anglophone mother, my French retains a tinge of her accent, and my looks betray an echo of that other lineage: I am taller than the average Québécois, and with red hair I look Irish, or at least Irish-ish. It is this slight off-ness, this nudge of difference, that has made it clear, over my now fifty-five years in Québec society, that I am not pure laine. And this has meant that in almost every single interaction in French, over my whole life, I've been asked where I am actually from. I used to be more nuanced in my response. Now I just say, Ireland.

The story I want to tell isn't about me, however. But it *is* about ancestors, and how they account for our value. To be seen as Irish has not harmed me in any palpable way. I have enjoyed fabulating about some Irish tendencies I may have, the conviviality of storytelling for instance, and have very much enjoyed seeing others with similar colouring on trips to Ireland or Newfoundland

– which is not to say that it isn't frustrating to be excluded from the only history I have actually known as "mine." That said, what I have most gleaned from the experience is how bad it must be for those who are many more shades different than I am. After all, my white-skinned, intellectual class privilege has opened pretty much any door I've wanted, and being completely bilingual has always served me well. I may not pass as pure laine, but I can laugh and joke in joual with the best of them, and I do understand that their question of where I am from bears no direct ill will towards me. It does keep us in a me-them binary, though, reminding me that belonging is never reducible to where you are from. My ancestry, after all, is deeply Québécois. My family on my father's side has been here for a long time, long enough to get some small renown for being excommunicated! But not long enough to properly include me. Erin means Ireland, after all.

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The story I really want to tell is about R., a friend and collaborator whose life and work has become deeply entwined with mine, and with the ethos of the 3Ecologies Project – a

parapedagogical altereconomic experiment situated on a large tract of land, off-grid, close to the village of Sainte-Anne-du-Lac, three hours north of Montréal.[4] R.'s family has lived in Sainte-Anne-du-Lac for generations, farming the land. He has inherited the land where he grew up, land he has bequeathed to the 3Ecologies Project in our shared commitment to take land out of the property market, giving it back to itself.

R. lives almost entirely in a subsistence economy. Coming from a family known for their poverty – perhaps the most extreme poverty in the area – he learned early how to live with very little, how to repurpose and fix things, how to grow food and raise animals. A bit of a cash economy has come of his years as a lumberjack, but that's hard northern work that one ages out of, especially if one is in ill health. Today he does very little work in the forest, mostly enjoying his time in the greenhouses and making do with what he has.

R. is neurodiverse. It's something that stands out about him, a beautiful difference, but one that would probably not be perceived as such in the village culture. More likely, it would be seen as a deficiency, a slight off-ness, a social encumbrance. In the everyday, his neurodiversity

4 www.3ecologies.org.

is mostly apparent through language – he thinks faster than he can speak and so leaves trails of half-sentences in the air, talking over them with hand gestures.

What most stands out about R. is not his poverty, however, but his way with plants. I have never seen such attunement to the vegetal and mycelial world. Following him in the forest, I have learned to encounter, with him, the web of plant life. All of this without show. There is no self-consciousness to his curiosity, no moral undertones. The forest world is simply where he lives, and where he thrives.

When R.'s mother died, to the horror of his many siblings, she bequeathed the family land to him, telling him to use it well – "*en faire bon usage*." It is this that led me to the purchasing of ancestors: *mesaïeux.com* offers an $8.99 entry point fee for creating your genealogical tree. It's by far the cheapest I've seen, and since I haven't been able to find many ancestors for R. on *myheritage.com* where I've been halfheartedly attempting to trace my own lineage, I decide to try my luck with the Québec site and see what I can find.

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Québec is known, in genealogical circles, for its thorough ancestry information. Darryl Leroux: in Québec there is an "unparalleled global archive of ancestral history" through which "all Québécois descendants of 17th century French settlers can trace their ancestry upwards of 10 generations to the St Laurence River Valley settlements" (2018, 81).[5]

This genealogical trove cements colonization's devastating take-over of the continent, where accounts of settling become *the* accounts of the land, the archive of its coming into being as "New France," and later as "Canada." The dominant account, that the land called "Canada" was

5 Darryl Leroux writes: "the Catholic Church's commitment to record and archive all aspects of its flock's religious lives led to the strength of the genealogical records" […] "a large part of the Church's commitment to record marriages in particular arose from its desire to emulate consanguinity to more than three generations…." "[I]t has long been common for historians and genealogists to argue for the *unique* place of genealogy in Québec. For instance, historian Leslie Choquette argued that France 'transformed the colony into a kind of laboratory of state-of-the-art social practices. Administrators and Catholic reform clerics extended their authority into every domain of social life; hence, the plethora of ecclesiastical, administrative, notarial, and judicial records that are such a boon to demographers and historians'" (2019, 18).

birthed through the hard work of the settlers, fosters a mythology of origins. Good records both in France and in New France (Québec), safeguard against any account that would come to challenge this "virgin" territory. As the land is rewritten through an archive of its begettings, the cultural imaginary of the First Nations who continue to live on this land is excised: for the most part their histories, their legacies, are kept out of the public account. It is the most alarming of paradoxes, then, that this very genealogical bank is what has propelled a recent movement to "reindigenize." Over the last two decades, ancestry sites in Québec have enabled tens of thousands of claims of "Indigeneity" based on a long-ago First Nations ancestor, a "149% increase of self-identified Métis and the appearance of nearly 20 organizations representing their political interests" (Leroux 2018, 81). Propelled by a "robust national genomics sector in the province," that traces lineage rather than culture, most often based on an ancestor dozens of generations back, this "reindigenization" depends on the registry's own logic: to keep colonizers in the practice of studied obfuscation of Indigenous culture and history. It does so not only by refusing to adhere to Indigenous ways of claiming

lineage through culture, contributing to "political efforts to redefine Indigeneity in ways that oppose Indigenous forms of self-determination," but by recolonizing the very idea of Indigeneity to suit settler ends (Leroux 2018, 81).[6]

Indigenous forms of self-determination rely on what Chris Andersen calls, following O'Toole,

6 A repeated claim by "Métis" in Québec is that "all Indigenous peoples in Québec are in fact Métis […] In Québec, it's not the Métis who don't exist, but pure Indians" (Leroux 2019, 57). Or: "I'm sure that the Indians (sic) all know that we're Métis, sure, of course, it's evident. […] Still, I think there aren't any pure Indians anymore, because the English killed them all in wars and there were epidemics. That's what I think and if there are pure Indians, they should get tested" (196). "Everybody who comes from the Côté-Nord before 1949 are clearly Aboriginal, 'bing bang,' hey, there are many, all the towns, all of the towns are 100% Métis, wall-to-wall, it's not a big deal, and often in the same time, they're Indian Métis. Yes, it has been, it's a fact" (169). This return to a notion of mixedness that would apply to all Québécois betrays the allegiance to whiteness in the newly "Indigenous" population, and "relies on notions of purity that deny Innu identity as a distinct Indigenous *people*" (Leroux 2019, 196). As Leroux underlines, "[t]heir insidious efforts are an example of what Sturm [in studying a similar trend amongst the Cherokee] calls 'symbolic inversion,' in that the regional Métis' are now claiming that they are better Indigenous peoples than the Innu, and ultimately, that the Innu no longer exist" (192).

"shared horizon[s] of legitimate political action" (O'Toole 2010, 41). Self-determination here departs from the colonial state's existing legal, political and economic structures, which enforce propertied segregation. Being Indigenous is unthinkable from the perspective of a propertied inheritor as defined by abstract lineage, propertied not only in the sense of living out the inheritance of a certain right to a mortgaged enclosure, but in the sense of defined by the nation-state's colonial imagination, as a unique, separate individual. Indigeneity is an ecology of relation. As Glen Coulthard writes, the relations that compose Indigeneity as concept and life cannot be separated out, settled apart: "In the Wedeleh dialect of Dogrib (which is my community's language), [...] 'land' (or *dè*) is translated in relational terms as that which encompasses not only the land (understood here as material) but also people and animals, rocks and trees, lakes and rivers, and so on. [...] [W]e are as much part of the land as any other element. Furthermore, within this system of relations, human beings are not the only constituent believed to embody spirit or agency. Ethically, this understanding means that humans hold certain obligations to the land, animals, plants, and lakes in much the same way that we hold obligations to other people. And if

these obligations are met, then the land, animals, plants, and lakes will reciprocate and meet their obligations to humans, thus ensuring the survival and well-being of all over time" (2010, 156–157).

Reindigenization *à la Métis* through the claiming of tenth-generation ancestors in Québec is recolonization: not only does it reimpose, on Indigeneity, the settler logic of propertied individuality, it wrests from those already suffering from settler colonial violence the paltry dividends they have been bequeathed by a state that keeps them out of drinking water, electricity, education and jobs.[7]

7 After decades of organizing, Kitcisakik, a First Nation situated in a wildlife reserve in western Québec, will be connected to the Québec electrical grid. They are not the last First Nation to use generators for electricity in Québec. "Many of the community's 400 members still wonder why it has taken 40 years to get electricity. Especially since there is a Hydro-Quebec dam that cuts through the middle of Kitcisakik. […] When you look at Hydro-Quebec, the first problem was when they built the Lac Dozois dam. They simply displaced the Indigenous people who lived along the river. We followed the fish. We were already living there." As of 2024 there is still no access to clean drinking water. https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/its-been-a-long-time-coming-kitcisakik-will-soon-be-hooked-up-to-electricity/.

63% of First Nations youth completed high school in 2015–2016, compared with 91% of the

In the Indigeneity marketplace, where Indigeneity is bought for profit (the profit of access to hunting and fishing rights and tax rebates, or access to the *idea* of firstness, through which a certain moral high ground can be claimed, in the desire not to fall into the role of settler, eschewing the responsibility that comes of having been privileged enough to be able to depend on the ongoing national imaginary of a certain right to sitedness), the colonizer-turned-Indigenous does not lose their colonial rights. Tacking an Indigenous ancestor onto a settler history means having it both ways: you retain the propertied rights you benefit from (the cultural belonging in the dominant imaginary of the nation-state and its passport, but also the access you've had to language, to education, to drinking water, to *life*), *and* you are now excused from the colonizing process (and the environmental devastation of ongoing colonization) because of some far-away ancestor whose lineage likely has no bearing whatsoever on your existence. You call yourself Métis as though it were a culture, as though this made

non-Indigenous population. https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/4548-first-nations-youth-experiences-and-outcomes-secondary-and-postsecondary-learning#.

you into a bearer of that culture, when in fact all you've done is appropriate a dangerously naive and superficial idea of Indigeneity *for profit.* You keep the self-centring primacy of the individual borne of the settler imaginary, and tack on the new identity on top. You call this new identity "Métis."[8]

Métis, in the Québec "reindigenizing" context, refers to race-mixedness. In the context of First Nations in Canada, mixedness on its own is not Métis. Being mixed historically has no bearing on cultural Indigenous belonging. One remains Cree, or Anishinaabe, whether or not one comes from mixed parentage. Métis is a culture, not a blood line. As Chris Andersen underscores, Métis is often "*misrecognized* as a hybrid off-shoot of two races – 'Indian' and 'white' – rather than as an *Indigenous people*" (2014, 6).

The Métis are one of three recognized First Peoples in Canada, along with First Nations and Inuit. Historically of the Red River Settlement in

8 Brenda MacDougall proposes the practice of "wahkootowin" – "a system of social obligation and mutual responsibility between members of a family" – as the basis for "a Métis 'style of life'" (in Leroux 2019, 62). See "Wahkootowin: Family and Cultural Identity in Northwestern Saskatchewan Metis," in *Canadian Historical Review* 87 (3): 431–462, 2006.

Manitoba, the Métis have, over two centuries, established their own governance structures and followed their own traditions and customs.[9]

"Whether or not an Indigenous individual or community self-identifies as Métis today, and whether or not the Indigenous community is 'older' than Red River, if the individual or group lacks a connection to the historical core in the Red River region, it is not Métis" (Andersen 2014, 6).[10]

9 On November 30, 2024, the Manitoba Métis Federation signed the first ever Red River self-governing Treaty in Canada. This cultural landmark recognizes the Manitoba Métis Federation as the Government of the Red River Métis, "affirming rights to self-government, lawmaking powers over Citizenship, elections and international operations." https://www.mmf.mb.ca/mmf-spotlight/red-river-metis-sign-landmark-treaty-securing-our-right-to-self-governance.

10 Important here is how the state's long arm plays into mixed-blood discourse to weaken the relational quality of self-determination in First Nations' cultures: "this mis-recognized racialization sits at the core of Canada's colonial claims to legitimacy as a nation-state. It not only conceals the historical and ongoing physical and symbolic violence that makes such claims appear logical, it also dismisses complex discussions about the epistemological gap between historical Indigenous self-identification and existing official classifications such as 'First Nations,' 'Métis,' and 'Inuit'" (Andersen, 6). He continues: "using Métis' as a conceptual placeholder for mixedness both relies on and reproduces a racialized hierarchy of Indigeneity

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Colonial myths of "pure laine" natural belonging are anti-Indigenous all the way back, and any nationalist calls for self-determination that have erupted since the Quiet Revolution play directly into this tendency. The history is well-documented.

Between roughly 1880 and 1930, the Québec government released a series of pamphlets entitled *Guide du Colon* (The Colonizer's Guide). They were written by different authors, each singling out a different region of Québec. All of them were geared toward colonization, their aim to seduce French European settlers. The pamphlet's cover for the region of Sainte-Anne-du-Lac (where the 3Ecologies Project is situated) has "*Emparons-nous de la terre*" (*Let's Grab the Land*) emblazoned on the top right.

Each pamphlet begins with an epigram. The one for Lac Saint-Jean, Chicoutimi and Saguenay (1921) says it all: "To clear the land is to extend

premised on a chain of logic that includes two elements: 1) if Métis are mixed, then First Nations and Inuit must not be (because, if we are all mixed, the term would lose its distinguishing power); and 2) if Métis are mixed and First Nations and Inuit are not, then, ipso facto, Métis must be less Indigenous (7).

the limits of the province, to develop resources, to add to its population and to create new markets, it is to continue the most beautiful of our traditions and to perpetuate the Canadian miracle" (L'Hon. L.A. Taschereau). "Colonization was the work of the past, it must also be the work of the future," reads another (Perrault).[11]

The pamphlets are a cross between tourist brochure and government contract. "Ah, the beautiful and luxuriant land promised to the colonizers of the future!"[12] "It becomes imperiously necessary to offer to European attention the deepest knowledge of the immense resources that our country possesses, so that this knowledge brings us new inhabitants who can develop with success the diverse commercial, industrial, mineral and agricultural branches, and everything that produces our national richness" (Stan Drapeau 1888).[13]

The promise is straightforward. Come to Québec and we will provide you, at very low cost, with 100 Acres of land, which you will clear and build on, according to our timetable, after which

11 *Province de Québec Région Nord-Ouest de Montréal et d'ottawa*, 1921.

12 *Guide du Colon, Les Régions Témiscamingue et d'abitibi ou le nord-ouest de Québec*, 1916.

13 *Le guide du Colon Français*, 1888.

you will receive a deed for it. Don't miss this great deal! "Canada is, before all else, an agricultural country; the land can be obtained at low cost from past owners, the government offers it or sells it at a price; this way, the immigrant farmer, if he has what he needs to live until the first harvest, one could say, generally speaking, that his future is assured" (Drapeau, 3).[14] But do keep in mind that not everyone is called to this task – there is an ideal colonizer: "A colonizer must be sober and be of good character," must "be in good health, have energy and love work," "must commit to assiduous work, to isolation, and expect temporary setbacks that might test his courage" (Magnan 1932, 11–12).[15] All of this with Christly oversight: a "devout of the ministry of colonization" will watch over the process. "In each diocese of colonization there is a colonizer-missionary whose role is to visit and encourage the colonizers" (Stan Drapeau, *Le guide du Colon Français*, 1888, 9).

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14 *Le guide du Colon Français*, 1888.

15 Hormisdas Magnan, *Le Guide du colon de la province de quebec*, 1932.

R. has struggled, over thirty or more years, with addiction and poverty. Pretty much everyone has let him down. Everyone except his mom. A mother of seven children, alone responsible for the family's sustenance when her husband became disabled after an accident in the woods and was no longer able to provide for them, she seemed capable of working magic with the little they had. Her gardens were her pride, and in this R. was her apprentice, and later her equal.

In the early days of 3E, I searched for people in Sainte-Anne-du-Lac who enjoyed gardening, and it was not a surprise that the person with whom I walked the forests, the lumberjack, was also the best gardener around. R. just has the touch, this feel for the earth that makes it possible for him to sense what needs more water, different soil, a little more shade, a companion plant. All of this with great modesty, his nimble but lumbering body unencumbered by any romanticism about the hard realities of subsistence living and yet infinitely curious about what the earth provides. This is how he grew up, with just enough, and how he continues to live, prizing his time over quick capitalist gain, and yet also struggling, day by day, to make ends meet. It is always precarious, always touch and go, always weighty with the

realities of all that does and could go wrong (roofs falling in, brakes failing on the truck, door latches no longer working on the car, opening mid-drive). And yet, in high summer when he has the most gorgeous tomatoes in the village, he gives them away, refusing payment, proud and excited to take visitors through the gardens and offer them some flowers, or a rare plant. The aim is never to square things down to zero. Excess – in all its minor variations – is a more powerful motivator.

R. learned about forests from his lumberjack father, but it was his mother's more subtle touch that he most connected to. Later, I learn about how his grandfather, a Lépine, taught his mother about medicinal plants, about gardens and trees. But I don't yet know this when I ask R., a year or so into our friendship, whether he is Indigenous. We are working in the garden, trying without much success to lift the heavy tomato plants off the earth with stakes, kicking ourselves for not having staked them earlier, especially since there are 400 of them! He stops working when I ask. Up north being Indigenous isn't necessarily considered a good thing. The moniker "*Indien*" gets thrown around with some derision, and there remains a sense that to be Indigenous is simply to be poor, to be cast out, to be of less value. When I ask around,

curious about the "L'île des Indiens" in the middle of the Lac Tapani on which the town is located, trying to better understand the Indigenous legacies of the small village, people can't tell me much, though in time I do hear about several in the community having "their papers." And in the offing, I note that here too there are stories about some *Indien* who "has a lot of potential," "is really smart" but "never gets anything done," who just can't "*show up*."

In the silence I sense R. navigating the hesitation. He turns away for a minute or two, moving the soil around a tomato. "There was a genealogy," he tells me, "but it was taken away by my siblings."

"The estate" is brought up almost every time we see each other, even now, five years after the fact. It's a wound that won't heal. When his mother died, she bequeathed the land to R. But his siblings, accustomed to seeing only lack in him, violently wrested everything they could from him, including his time to grieve. Because it had been he who had cared for his mother, living with her, in her final years, and he who had kept the land fertile, growing gardens and tending the greenhouses.

All they wanted was to get him out, or, at the very least, to get everything of value out. They

tried, at first, to contest the will. When they failed, they counted on his neurodiversity – and the longstanding effects of him having been mistreated and abused – and on his poverty – the lack of access to lawyers, or to the internet – to keep him from being able to fight back. They took as much as they could, and this included the hand-drawn genealogy made for his mother by her niece, hanging in the kitchen.

Left alone in a house where even the wood stove had been taken, a house in which his mother had until recently been alive, R. fell into a deep depression. All of this came back to life through my question. Later I would understand with more nuance what had been left unsaid in that long silence, but at the time, what I knew for sure is that he had inherited something very singular from his mother, and that despite his sibling's attempt to wrest everything from him, it kept him alive. Barely.

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"Let's grab the land" has never ceased being the mantra. From extractive lumber practices to mining to hydroelectric dams, the First Nations have been displaced, disenfranchised and

impoverished across what is now called Canada. It's not just the loss of lands, it's the direct assault on everything to do with culture and way of life. The 1984 drowning of 10000 caribou is a case in point: "a disaster [that] occurred when Hydro-Québec opened the Caniapiscau reservoir spill gates two hundred and seventy miles upstream from Limestone Falls on the Caniapiscau river. This caused the river level to rise and send a torrent of water towards the Ungava Bay. At their traditional river crossing, thousands of caribou were swept over the falls and drowned."[16] The flooding has since resulted in lake contamination, the mercury levels so high it is unsafe to consume local fish. Not to speak of the loss of fresh water in several communities. To make matters worse, the electricity generated by the massive hydroelectric plants is not available to several of the Indigenous communities who still rely today on generators for their power, remaining dependent on fossil fuels.[17] Closer to home, the

16 See Margaret Grace Orr, "10000 Drowned: Commemorating the Caribou." https://ourspace.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/8e2ba3c4-fc33-4a14-9e0e-7ec85127e9da/content.

17 "There are approximately 178 remote Indigenous and Northern communities that are not connected to the North American electricity grid and

Anishinaabe community of Kitcisakik could only watch, in February 2024, when their tribal council burnt down. There was no running water to put it out, or electricity to power a hose.

In the afterlife of colonization that leaves vast areas of the north without the resources the First Nations need to thrive, the colonizer's appetite has not waned. The current move toward "reindigenization" by so-called Québécois Métis is a symptom of the cultural belief that settling is a right. The only difference: now colonization is not only of Indigenous lands, but of Indigeneity itself.

As Andersen, Leroux and others remind us, the Métis are a culture, not a simple mixture of genetics. Theirs is a history of "political institutions, linguistic practices and cultural forms that depended on ongoing kinship relations with Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine and Dene peoples."[18] As Gaudry writes in Canadian Encyclopedia (2016), "Historical Métis were not the automatic result of 'mixing,' but 'were real human beings

natural gas infrastructure." https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/en/data-analysis/energy-markets/market-snapshots/2023/market-snapshot-clean-energy-projects-remote-Indigenous-northern-communities.html#.

18 https://maisonneuve.org/article/2018/11/1/self-made-metis/.

who had choice in the matter and who created a political and social entity of their own accord."[19]

Kim TallBear's voice is heard everywhere around questions of reclaiming ancestry. "'I am honouring all of my lineages'" she warns, "strikes me as indicative of the problem that over-use of 'descent' can actually indicate – the conflation of ancestry with being Indigenous, or belonging to an Indigenous community."[20] Descent, in its bare form, tells us as much about conquest as it does about filiation. Indigeneity is not a 10th generation ancestor, but the relational web of collective claim. This is what is heard in the hesitation around concepts of identity, in TallBear's work, and in the repeated warning that blood by itself is not the quantum for Indigeneity, but the way colonialism has defined a people it has done everything it could to eradicate.

With the claim of Métis ancestry by large swathes of Québec's population comes the emptied general category of Indigeneity. The ancestor takes up residence in this generality as an abstract marker of recolonizable rights. Through ancestry, usually going back nine or

19 Gaudry in https://maisonneuve.org/article/2018/11/1/self-made-metis/.

20 https://kimTallBear.substack.com/p/Indigenous-race-shifting-red-flags#details.

ten generations, the Indigeneity is reclaimed in service of gaining access to that small sliver that has been protected from being grabbed, be it a small corner of land that has been kept from excessive fishing and hunting, or the availability of tax exemptions. The claim on identity, it should be repeated, in no way mitigates the harm that continues to be done to First Nations populations: it exacerbates it.

In Québec there are eleven recognized nations – Algonquins, Mohawks, Abenaki, Atikamekw, Cree, Huron-Wendat, Malecite, Mi'gmaw, Naskapi, Innu and Inuit. To demonstrate status, the ancestry has to be within three generations. But ancestry alone is not the proof of Indigeneity. The web of relations is what matters. This hasn't stopped the tens of thousands who have claimed "their papers" over the past twenty-five years – a 334% increase. "If this tendency continues, in 15 years they will be more numerous than First Nations."[21]

The claim of "Métis" status based on far-off ancestors, ancestors with whom no lived relation exists,[22] settles "Indigeneity," muting it

21 https://ici.radio-canada.ca/recit-numerique/1547/peuple-autochtone-metis-canada-usurpateurs?gad_source=1.

22 There is an important discourse of the unclaimed, or difficult to claim, that is the result of "losing"

to conform to an image of itself. Indigeneity becomes an ideal that has little to do with the histories, the genealogies, the intricacies, of peoples whose ecologies of relation have spawned cultures of resistance and survival over hundreds of years of devastation. Nor does it contend with the complex ways in which Indigenous populations have reinvented themselves in the face of the genocidal violence, creating new traditions, new cultures. Indigeneity is a hollow to be filled by the whiteness that now carries its card.[23]

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ancestry because of the sixties scoop and all the violent effects of colonialism, including shame about being Indigenous, shame passed on to children who are wrested from their Indigenous history because of it. The "Métis" who are claiming status in large numbers are not to be confused with those urban Indigenous folks who have ancestry but have trouble finding their relations, or who feel uneasy connecting with them. It's vital to understand that there is mixed blood in all First Nations – being mixed blood doesn't make you any less Indigenous. The problem with naming that mixedness as "Métis" is that it makes a claim on a culture – the Métis – narrowing it to its bloodlines. This brings a colonial logic to Indigeneity. See Chris Andersen (2015), Dylan Miner (2018), Allyson Stevenson (2024).

23 The way whiteness plays out in this discourse is complex in its slippage, as Darryl Leroux also points out (2019). On the one hand, there is a distance from "white peoples," especially when speaking of

And with it comes a certain benevolent racism: a generalized and superficial notion of "land" (including the appropriation of rituals such as sweat lodges, and a general belief in one's intuitive sense of the surrounds, usually with a dash of anti-urban posturing), a "spiritualist" dogma

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the government, which is seen as siding with the Indigenous populations (notably the Innu). "[W]hite people giving the land to the Indians" […] "Those people who betrayed us, who sold us out, I will never have anything to do with people like that again… I don't consider myself white anymore, because those people betrayed us" (176). "I consider myself less white than I did before because they betrayed us, in my opinion, they're Judas" (177). White is the power broker on the one hand, but also the ultimate gauge: "[White] people see that we are trying to establish equilibrium in the treaty negotiations, thus suits white people and, well, we're just like them, you know, they see [sic] us on the radio, they see us in the newspapers, they know us, we shouldn't forget that there was a lot of resistance to the Approche commune around here, there was an uprising against it" (184). Ultimately, "white people" give credence to the "Métis" movement by acknowledging its importance in "protecting" territory from the Innu. "[White people] then see that our approach is to stop the treaty process so they're quite happy with that, they then support the organization" (173). This is whiteness, which was never, in any case, reducible to white skin. Whiteness is the slippery changeability of identity, and the claim it makes for the settling: become what you need to be to get what you want to get which in any case was already yours.

that reifies normative culture-nature hierarchies (keeping whiteness on the side of culture while basking in a comfortable, mortgaged nature). Canada's "multicultural" constitution has given us the tools, after all, to thrive in this kind of soft hierarchy where whiteness maintains its standing while benefitting from the surplus-value (of life) Indigeneity affords.

And so it must be asked, again: where, in the claims for Métis status, in the growing web of organizations that claim ownership of culture, is there a real commitment to connect to the living populations, to be in the concern of their daily challenges, to create conditions for the sharing of resources, to mobilize for clean drinking water and Indigenous-led education? Where is there the modest commitment to step aside, to assist without centring oneself, to be of the relation's ecology? Who, amongst the usurping colonizers chooses to live without safe drinking water, or wants to live through the horrors of intergenerational trauma? Much easier is to hold onto some dead idea of the Indian, reclaimed as fishing and hunting rights, and some handy tax breaks.

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Fais-en bon usage.

R.'s mother's last words are often on the tip of his tongue. They are the bridge through which we connect, and collaborate. And the impetus for that $8.99.

Make good use of it.

The descent into genealogy is shaky at first. We are not sure how R.'s father and grandfather's names are spelled. Across a range of documents, their names come up with more than one spelling, leading me down some strange paths, finding a "grandfather," for instance, who died in WWI, and another one alive and well, two hundred years old, south of Montréal. But long hours of detective work (for which I am not cut out) pay off: I find enough information on both sides of his lineage to get matches. Often, I am exhausted and want to give up. But the sites know how to counter this tendency: with each match a little icon blinks. These little dopamine enhancers keep you at it.

On *mesaieux.com* every ancestor comes at a price. Cousins are the cheapest, on par with marriage and death certificates. Celebrities and royalty are the most expensive: it cost me $49 to find out that R. shares a long ago lineage not only with Céline Dion, but with Madonna!

Likely story. But that information also gave me the Filles du Roy. Pure gold.

Descendancy should be understood as the fabulation it is. Blood is already abstract. What makes a family, any family, is the field of relation it capacitates. It is here, it seems to me, that Indigenous discourses around "being claimed" find their resonance and teach us, those of us who are not Indigenous, what it might mean to live relationally. Because if family is not reducible to the nuclear theatre of private property, if family is not limited to the cordoning off of mortgaged existence, if family is about movements across, about open passage, then family is always more-than, and can never be reduced to ancestry.[24]

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Fais-en bon usage.

Why is it that this imperative statement – take care of it well, or make good use of it – feels Indigenous to me? It is a spurious claim, however argued, that the gesture of care for the

24 See Kim TallBear "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family," in *Making Kin Not Population*, eds. Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (Chicago, Illinois: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018).

land is identifiable as Indigenous. Surely I am not interested in reducing care for the land to such an abstract (and rehearsed) account of the "native," reproducing the figure of the nature-culture divide in the name of lost Indigeneity?

I suspect two things are at work, both of them problematic. First, I desperately want R. to be claimed. I am aware, of course, that this is not something I have to give beyond my own claim, which I do with great honour. We laugh together and truly love each other as the siblings we always wanted. And it's not as though he is not loved by others – his ebullient kindness, his open curiosity and intelligence attract people. But it makes me sad to watch others take advantage of him. Being part of a village is a new experience for me. One thing I learn is that once someone has been defined it's very difficult for them to be perceived otherwise. R. has been seen as someone who has little, who is perhaps not worthy of more, and so there has been a habit of bartering for what he has (cannabis, vegetables, wood), leaving him with little to show for his work. In this context, the desire for him to be claimed has some relationship to my wanting others to see his value. But that's also not quite it, since Indigeneity doesn't really have any value up here.

This leads to the second: I want him to claim his own value.

Now, I am not certain at all that R. would see value in the way I see it in an Indigenous lineage, and so I inquire again, a year after my initial question. Do you have Indigenous lineage? Yes, he tells me. And he unveils a picture of his maternal grandfather, a man who would definitely pass as First Nations.

I suspect this was all that was needed. R. was claimed in a genealogical fabulation that afternoon, a claim less to do with *being* Indigenous than connecting to a genealogy that carries with it a regard for the things he most cares about. Beyond that, it's all quite abstract. That he is pretty sure his mother's side was Indigenous has no real import since he has no connection to a wider web of culture, and he never will. He is still poor, still an outsider, still struggling. But stories do weave themselves into our afternoon together. After picking the tomatoes he suggests we take a break, and as we sit inside together and he lights a cigarette, he tells me some tales about his grandfather and the farm, about sowing seeds, about the animals, about mushroom hunting, about the harvest. His mother comes up. He tells me stories she told him about her

youth with her father, about their time in the forest. He smiles, and then tries to convince me we're done for the day (there is still a lot of picking to do, but I rarely get my way once R. has decided the day's work is done). We talk some more. I ask about the exquisite flower garden his mother left behind and he returns to memories of her. There is never a conversation where his mother doesn't come up – she is with him from the morning when he lights the candle by her photograph all through the day, every action measured against her ways of doing things. She is a wise passenger in a life that is never easy, but always tinged with what I have elsewhere called a shape of enthusiasm. Joy need not be reduced to happiness. Spinoza would certainly argue for a concept of joy that is wholly qualitative, wholly alive in the more-than that cannot be reduced to happy or sad, good or evil. R. lives there.

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Leroux, echoing TallBear and Munsterhjelm, argues that "genes linked to Indigenous peoples in the lab are treated as 'natural' resources in settler society […] becoming the property inheritance of these same settlers, who consequently

use these resources to govern settler-Indigenous relations in keeping with existing colonial frameworks" (2018, 83). This leads to what he calls "genomic sovereignty," a "deliberate interpretation of genomic data to match the social historical record and a reimagining of historical and cultural narratives to make sense of genomic findings" (83). The rampant growth of a Québec-based "Métis" population settles this descent into organizations that transform pure laine identity into a new brand of purity – Indigeneity without relation, Indigeneity without history. Pure laine now goes all the way back: the Québécois Métis is no longer a settler. He is the descendant.

To settle, to be settled, in a time without history, is to disavow change. The ancestor on the genetic map is useful here. After all, the ancestor can't refuse being claimed. It is this placid acceptance that gives the Québécois Métis that open field they so crave. "We've never had rights, only Indians have had rights, us, we don't have any" (Leblanc in Giroux).[25]

"If all French descendants with a seventeenth-century Indigenous ancestor suddenly

25 https://maisonneuve.org/article/2018/11/1/self-made-metis/.

claimed to be Indigenous there would be over six million new Indigenous people in Canada, more than tripling the current number."[26]

Claiming oneself in the shroud of victimhood reeks of whiteness. Whiteness settles the claim, is always settling the claim. Front and centre, in the colonizing mantra "let's grab the land," this is what the colonizer has always felt is his right, and his duty. Pretendians are resettling the imaginary of the land, now that the land has been so relentlessly grabbed as to be facing its endtimes.

It will not come as a surprise, then, to read that some of the Métis organizations that have sprouted in the ancestral theft are rabidly right-wing. These groups grew out of long-standing resistance to Indigenous rights, infiltrated, in some areas, by the racist *Association pour le droit des blancs* (*The Association for White Rights*). In the words of founding "chief" Jean-Réné Tremblay, "[t]he Métis community is the only way to counter the Innu, who want to control the entire territory. [White people] tried with other organizations, for example, Équité Territoriale, which... failed because to effectively counter a treaty, you have to be a part of

26 https://maisonneuve.org/article/2018/11/1/self-made-metis/.

it. […] To be a part of it, you're either the government or you're Aboriginal" (in Leroux).[27]

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By now I have spent almost $300. What I know with certainty is that R. is pure laine: Filles du Roy on all sides. His genealogy is remarkable in its detail – descendants going back to the 1620s. Little icons of women with white bonnets – five of them – let me know of the life-span of his early women settlers, each of whom was paid paltry sums to populate the land. Catherine Clerice lived from 1653–1715; Catherine Fournier from 1651–1726; Françoise Lefrancois from 1647–1699; Anne Leroy from 1641–1715; Anne Potreay from 1652–1699.

The one that interests me most, because I am drawn to the Lépine side, is Catherine Fournier. Her story fills a little burgundy text-box. Born in France in 1651, she arrives in New France in 1670, at the age of nineteen. Married the same year to Mathurin Mercadier-Lahaye, she has only two children with him. Two years later she marries again, settles in Varennes and has eleven children.

27 https://maisonneuve.org/article/2018/11/1/self-made-metis/.

At sixty-one years of age, she marries for the third time, resettles in Repentigny, dying fourteen years later. Joseph Lépine, the maternal great-grandfather, is on this line, a descendent who comes into the family by marriage. Is he Indigenous? Impossible to tell without a better genealogist.

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R. and I spend a bit of time with the genealogy, lured by its many branches. But soon we lose interest, delving into a conversation about the theft of land. He doesn't have his reading glasses and the screen makes him dizzy. "It was never our land," he says.

He's been unwell. The work that has sustained him financially, and that has defined him, is no longer possible. He speaks, sometimes, of what would happen to him if he lost his dog. Having often edged into the kind of despair that makes living itself a question, I understand him. But I can't bear to think about losing him.

The conversation weaves. We laugh often. My partner B. talks of his own strange genealogy – a genealogy marked on a skin that reveals little about his actual lived experience. What is it to pass in most circumstances as white, and yet

to be stopped in airports for being a perceived threat to the whiteness of settled narratives about the self-same? What is it to be perceived both as the same and the other?

We return to the question of Indigeneity and land. It occurs to me that the claim, that the desire to have R. claimed, is not something I imagine him sharing with his siblings. What is this "Indigeneity" that wants nothing to do with birth family, except insofar as it takes us away from the horror of how birthlines imprison us?

Whiteness is certainly at work here, if only in the belief that such a fabulation is claimable. Is it not exactly the settler's prerogative to believe that all claims are ours to make? But humour is stronger than the piousness of white fragility. "You bought them?!" he roars, almost falling off his chair. "Céline Dion?!" "Madonna!"

A germ of Madonna is equal to the abstractness of a Joseph Lépine. Nonetheless, Joseph Lépine retains my curiosity, given the role the person of the same name and his descendants played in the 1885 North-West Resistance, a response to broken treaties, starvation and encroachment on their lands by new settlers. His uncle, Ambroise Dydime Lépine, was a Métis politician and military leader under the command of Louis Riel

during the Red River Rebellion of 1869–1870. But he's not *our* Joseph Lépine, despite the fact that both are from the Québec region. Our Joseph is only the echo of an idea, not that different from suddenly realizing that Céline Dion is a distant cousin. Fabulations take us with them. Seeds for stories that can't be told from a tree.

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We live in dour times. There is not much humour in our identity claims. Pretendians tend to make headway through pious pronouncements and lofty aspirations. They do good work, some of them. Did they need to steal someone else's experience, to usurp their histories (without suffering their ills), to get where they are? Would they have been heard without this value-added? Joseph Boyden writes remarkable novels, and Buffy Sainte-Marie was a vital voice in a period where it wasn't yet common currency to value Indigeneity. I just wish they had had less of a need to make sense of their actions through claims made on the backs of a people not theirs to account for.

Fabulation is a potent force. Its power of the false is its capacity to internally differ from itself. It is this, the power of the false, that pulls

fabulation out of any connection to myth-making, the power of the false that quality of the interstice that populates the dissensus of time's incompossibility. When time is no longer a line, more-than one modality of expression moves experience in the current of a future-pastness, at once catapulting it into an instant of form-taking and cutting fissures into that form. Time is never intact in its actualization. No account of it can claim the identity of the line.

This makes it sound like you can fabulate yourself into a line, onto a line. But that's myth-making. Because being "of the line," pretending the line in the shape of Pretendian aspirations, is not to expose the shape of falsity's flash. It is to myth-make a truth, to shape the truth to your shape. Myth-making stabilizes the claim, settles it (in the lie, more often than not). Fabulation does something altogether different – it catches the spark of life's unruliness, prolonging it. It has a trickster quality.

Fabulation is the intensification of the more-than of "no one account." It refuses the true-false dichotomy that perpetuates the kinds of myths settler-colonialism thrives on, myths that are built on reified concepts of the human, on ideals of race, on normopathic presuppositions.

Fabulation is a pulse that powers the field of relation to activate – not extract – an orientation. This orientation is a path. This path produces a world. There is no overseer to the path, no outside mediator. The path is its own orientation, *immediating*.[28] Not world+story but a storying that worlds. The fundamental difference here, between myth-making and fabulation is the status of the world. Fabulation does not describe a world as though there could be another one, had another path been taken. Fabulation travels its interstices, lives them. It powers worlds into act: "The power of the false exists only from the perspective of a series of powers, always referring to each other and passing into one another" (Deleuze 1989, 133).

When Pretendians construct the myth of their Indigeneity, they separate out lineage and story, tempted by the true that haunts all myths. The tragedy – because it really is a tragedy to experience the cut of relation that is whiteness, and to feel you have to live in its reduced image of the world – is that they have not felt the pull of

28 Immediation refuses the between-two of mediation. It does its work in the time of relation, which is to say, the time of the event. See *Immediation*, eds. Erin Manning, Anna Munster, and Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen (London: Open Humanities Press, 2019).

fabulation, a pull that could have saved them the necessity of this kind of pretence. Through fabulation, instead of standing in for another, there could have been the chance – there still could be the chance – of carrying the worlding otherwise. With the powers of the false, there could have been an assault on whiteness that didn't have to take over the settled body of the other. Because let's be clear: it is never a living body one settles into. It is always the dead image of the other, the image of the *Indien*, one aims to become.

Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary of becoming is often misunderstood. Becoming, in process philosophy, does not mark passage on a line, as though a becoming moved from one form to another along a continuum. "Becoming produces nothing other than itself" (1987, 238). Becoming is never a form channeled, from white to red. Becoming is the intensive differential activated in the channeling that shifts the very conditions of form, unsettling its presuppositions.

Pretendians are not a new phenomenon, but the "decolonizing" institution since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada has fostered ideal conditions for their recent infiltration *en masse*. Warning signs: vague claims, family secrets, shifting or conflicting secrets,

reliance on DNA testing.[29] Taillet: "It does boggle my brain, how do you keep all those lies, balls up in the air, for decades."[30]

A quick internet search of the keyword "decolonization" with "university" reveals statements from all Canadian universities on their commitment to reimagining the role of Indigeneity in their institutions. From *Universities Canada*: "universities commit to ensuring that non-Indigenous students, faculty, staff and leadership have the training and resources they need to uphold their responsibility to work towards reconciliation and decolonization across their institutions."[31] Common keywords in documents on the site include "Indigenous-led resurgence and revitalization," "Indigenous talent," "respectful, mutually beneficial and collaborative," "Indigenization of curricula," "acknowledge systemic anti-Indigenous oppression and commit to building welcoming and respectful campus environments."[32]

29 Brenna Owen, 2023. https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/Indigenous-identity-fraud.

30 Jean Teillet, 2023. https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/Indigenous-identity-fraud.

31 Universities Canada's commitments to truth and reconciliation. https://univcan.ca/media-room/publications/universities-canadas-commitments-to-truth-and-reconciliation/#:~:text=.

32 Idem.

"Equity, diversity and inclusion" (EDI, or DEI in the United States) has evolved from these commitments, including new administrative offices, faculty committees and best practices. Typical amongst these, in Canada, is the fostering of onsite training to better understand questions of diversity, including focus on anti-blackness and disability issues, the aim to bend the colonial university to decolonial aspirations. Rhetoric abounds, much of it stereotypical, some of it alarming. I have found myself, for instance, on committee meetings with all sighted members while people described the colour of their clothing; have been privy to the kind of diversity policing between white-skinned colleagues that seems less about shifting modes of valuation within the institution than performing their ongoing weaponizing of the scarce resources; have noted ongoing neurotypical tendencies playing themselves out in the name of racial consciousness; have recognized how little knowledge there is about caste issues and how they play out amongst racialized hires, especially in the sciences. EDI is not the culprit of racism and neurotypicality, but to foreground it as the cure is to downplay the dangers of settled colonial tendencies: "Canadians value an inclusive country, where equity is embedded, and diversity

welcomed. Canadian identity is expressed in the shared values of openness, fairness and tolerance. Building on this, Canada's universities believe our teaching, research and community engagement are also enriched by diversity and inclusion."[33]

In "Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Canadian Universities," a section entitled "EDI at a glance" claims that 89% of Canadian institutions make explicit reference to EDI in their strategic plan, 88% have a campus wide definition and 83% have an EDI action plan in development or already implemented.[34] The movement toward rhetorically claiming the commitment to diversity is its own bureaucracy these days.[35] But sparse

33 https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/UC-2023-EDI-Report_EN_FA_Web.pdf.

34 Idem.

35 The responsibility for upholding these practices inevitably falls on racialized faculty, often untenured. Jayawardane and Walcott: "In the past year, several universities encouraged faculty to design and teach more courses that address "social justice" and "diversity". Many faculty of colour are already expected to teach high-enrollment courses that fit within "diversity" requirements. And we routinely experience pushback from both white male and female students – as well as our own colleagues – as we try to tackle this mammoth task without the necessary institutional support and just compensation." https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/7/

reflection is interwoven into these bureaucratic processes about how the university continues to favour colonizing, neurotypical modes of knowledge and productivity. Land acknowledgements have become the norm, recognizing the stolen land their mortgaged interests depend on. It often feels like one of those cul-de-sacs in the suburbs. A little enclave of respectable rhetoric without a through way.

We should all want diversity, but to believe that colonial institutions are decolonizing through EDI statements on their money-for-credit platforms is to wilfully disregard the way the neoliberal institution relies on colonial practices to thrive.[36] Every performance report, every

diversity-efforts-in-universities-are-nothing-but-facade-painting.

36 The danger is of course that EDI/DEI will favour leadership that will keep colonialism very much in place: "DEI is becoming a multibillion-dollar industry: corporations, companies, nonprofits," the AFSC leader told The Intercept. "The data shows a tiny percentage of the directors are Black. And now you have white people in brown face getting into DEI positions, with its salary, resources, and power." About the Raquel Evita Saraswati controversy, another race-shifter who took on a racialized identity, Sana Saeed "told the Intercept in an email that the Saraswati controversy is an indictment of the diversity, equity, and inclusion industry's shortcomings and 'puts a sharp, bright light on [...] the

step up the hierarchy, requires meeting the criteria for legibility normative forms of scholarship have turned into academic regulation. We must adhere to these modes lest we are said to be of little influence. Every journal article published, every art show juried, runs into this problem of the gateway. Certainly, some gateways are more open than others, but there is no question that the systems in place to blindly review one another have resulted in a certain terror of being outed for not adequately mobilizing the current criteria for excellence *despite carrying over the very same value systems*. To ignore the fact that this requires a certain countenance as regards what passes as "general" knowledge, to sidestep how meeting criteria requires knowing what those

DEI industry itself – did AFSC not vet their candidates, like Raquel?' She added, "There's long been a critique that companies and organizations use DEI as a shield against criticism of structural issues that continue to persist in the workplace; the people often hired in these positions are not qualified and will usually hurt, more than help, in redressing problems around inequities and exclusion. For the AFSC – known for its progressive values and history – to have hired such an individual is also a damning indictment of how superficial and detrimental, to safe and inclusive workplaces, DEI can often be." https://theintercept.com/2023/02/16/american-friends-service-committee-raquel-saraswati/.

criteria are, to suppose that every scholar moves through knowledge in the mode of neurotypicality, or has access to the ways of knowing that are presupposed, is not to make room for difference. It is to fit difference into settling's predisposition. It is to *settle* difference.

Public rhetoric around EDI risks doing little more than deviating attention from ongoing neoliberal rehearsals of the self-same.[37] It is precisely this tendency that opens the door wide for Pretendians. We must never underestimate what the job calls for: those cluster hires for Indigeneity are targeting a very specific kind of candidate, one who already knows how to hit the ground running, who will not challenge the colonial presuppositions around value (despite expectations that they sit on every committee around decolonization), who will adjudicate their peers according to existing criteria, maintaining the false scarcity we have all accepted as the "truth" of academia. In competition for scarce resources, those colleagues, like all of us, will tend to keep to themselves around issues that might complicate these neoliberal expectations, hoping to quietly climb the ladder, telling

37 See Brian Massumi, *Power at the End of the Economy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

themselves that once they are "safe" they will talk back. In my experience, that rarely happens, not because faculty are not critical, nor miserable, but because by then they are too exhausted.

To be properly Indigenous for the academy means settling for the terms of its engagement (which includes mobilizing the funds that come to you, and learning how to best make it work for yourself and others). It means upholding systems of evaluation that construct knowledge as an arc (think prerequisites), demanding normative forms of participation (speaking, paying attention, frontality); front-loading "method" in your courses to be able to anticipate how research is made legible to the very academy that polices it. Beautiful teaching happens, of course, in the midst of all of this. But the frame remains.[38]

38 On EDI M. Neelika Jayawardane and Ronald Walcott write: "Universities are committed to keeping things as they are, while suggesting otherwise. And, even more importantly, most university administrations expect those of us who notice that change is not happening to keep quiet and be civil about the betrayal. Those requests to faculty to look after students in a moment of crisis belie a much deeper problem in the university: its own reluctance to adequately account for the violence it is party to." https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/7/diversity-efforts-in-universities-are-nothing-but-facade-painting.

When this is done "in the name" of EDI or decolonization, very little changes, in my experience, systemically-speaking. "As institutions in which violent practices are embedded, universities and colleges declare their commitment to diversity and inclusion, talk the good liberal talk, but actually do little to make substantive change" (Jayawardone and Walcott).[39] Other ways of knowing that do not include self-entrepreneurship – the foregrounding of oneself or others as individuals – are not only unrecognized but deemed a threat to the edifice's commitment to defining what counts.[40]

EDI is of course not the cause of this. It *has* afforded some collective recognition that there are questions that should be attended to in the quotidian expressions of what it means to learn in the university, and continues to foreground vital conversations, especially in a US-centric context where the teaching of diversity in any and all forms has, in several states, been banned.[41]

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39 https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/7/diversity-efforts-in-universities-are-nothing-but-facade-painting.

40 Group-work is a case in point.

41 The conversation around DEI in the United States is quite different, and should be addressed with an eye to the violent banning of books and teachings. This is

It's never a bad thing to be taught "decolonial" methods (though it seems to escape people that method is by definition a colonial approach to knowledge, packing up a trajectory for thought

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not happening in Canada, where a more passive-aggressive approach pickled in white benevolence tends to be the norm. In the US, nearly half the states have either proposed anti-DEI bills or are in the protest of drafting them, bills that impact a range of initiative, including defunding DEI offices and removing diversity statements from hiring practices. A few examples: in Alabama, House Bill 7 prohibits the affirmation or endorsement of "divisive" concepts relating to race, sex or religion. In Arizona, under Senate Bill 16 (not yet signed into law), public colleges would be prohibited from engaging in DEI programming or establishing a DEI office. In Florida, under House Bill 999 and Senate Bill 266, public institutions are prohibited from maintaining DEI programs and offering "any general education that 'teaches identity politics or is based on theories that [suggest] systemic racism, sexism, oppression and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States.'" This extends, in Florida, to anything that could make a white student feel ashamed for being white. https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/anti-dei-legislation-tracker/#:~:text=.

There are currently more than thirty bills across the country, most recently, one in Utah. See also: https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/state-mandates-around-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/states-with-restrictions-on-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-concepts-in-higher-education/.

before the thinking even begins).[42] Where EDI becomes a threat is when it is reduced a checkbox, a recognition merely on paper. Three Indigenous cluster-hires, check. Two Black hires, check. One trans hire, check. One neurotypically-inflected disability hire, check. Because, it should be underscored, there is little that is more dangerous to the EDI-fied university than neurodiversity and its tendency to be immune to colonizing leap-frog academic social-climbing. Bringing in diversity never means diversifying the way the institutions plays their endgame.[43]

I was moved, in a recent hiring process for Indigenous faculty, to hear all three shortlisted candidates refer to each other with enthusiasm in their public talks, refusing to play into the competitive scarcity narrative the university upholds, even reminding us that each of them would be a very good candidate for the job. But I was also concerned, when one member was chosen for the prestigious Canada Research Chair program, that they might not be legible to the government agency. When I raised this issue, I

42 See Erin Manning, "Against Method," in *The Minor Gesture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

43 See Erin Manning, "Me Lo Dijo un Pajarito," in *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

was met with some resistance: it's tempting to idealize Indigenous bodies without realizing what kinds of straightjackets our hiring processes put them in. The Dean responded favourably to my suggestion, however, and there was indeed a need for translation in order to make the candidate's work legible. This transvaluation is often necessary in other cases – neurodiversity, chronic illness – and is work that faculty with standing should always do to make sure paths are laid for other ways of learning. In this case, the issue was that their research was mostly art-based, and would need to be shaped on paper in ways that a government body built on social science criteria would be able to recognize its scholarly importance. This was done, and the candidate received the position. But often, this process is bypassed in favour of those faculty who would already meet the criteria, people who already know how the system works, garnering them not only easy entry but seamless continuance. Because that's really the hiring criteria: fitting yourself into existing ways of working. Value in academia is, after all, based on meeting existing criteria of inclusion, existing norms around excellence. It's about coercing students to toe the line, buying into the idea that they need to

be disciplined, to be present to your teaching, to learn things in a pre-established order, to bend to existing ways of thinking. Normopathy organizes the template. There is no room here for discussions of how the embedded frontality of the classroom individualizes the students in ways that often makes thinking (and participating) impossible; that the typical venues for sharing work – conferences, exhibitions – require neurotypical social skills; that presuppositions around knowing how to do all of this depend on intergenerational access to the institution.

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Should we be stunned, under these conditions, that these "Indigenous" positions so often get filled by Pretendians? Pretendian faculty positions uphold the neoliberal institution, and so do the sensationalizing articles that call them out. Anything that recentres the individual over systemic issues continues to support that very scarcity model that keeps us quiet. Anything that individualizes, that pushes further afield any ecology of practices. "Settler institutions and media outlets – they always want to tell the individual story; it is not to their benefit to focus

on the collective rights – collective – I don't want to use that word identity, but collective forms of belonging that we have," writes TallBear. "Related to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion [...] without attention to Indigenous nations as governments, and Indigenous citizenship and kinship rules as guideposts [...] helps create our problems. It not only enables, but encourages box checking."[44]

EDI, as TallBear argues, not only builds on the rampant individualizations of our ongoing discourse of self-entrepreneurship, reshaping Indigeneity to fit into its colonizing framework, it also flagrantly replays the dominant (white) multicultural discourse at the heart of the Canadian identity-myth. "There's still too much emphasis on what multicultural discourse produces, which is an attention to individual identity and choice in that identity. [...] So, if the system is designed to respond in an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion way that's focused on individualism and on personal identity claims, how do we get them to refocus on the kinds of collectivist definitions that we want to foreground?"[45]

44 https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/kim-TallBear-comments-on-Indigenous.

45 https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/kim-TallBear-comments-on-Indigenous.

The figure of "choice" is key here, that belief that we are who we choose to be, those of us who aren't *identified* in that othering movement that racializes. To stand unidentified has always been the privilege of whiteness, of those who are given to be the baseline, the stable ground from which all else differs. The prerogative to "remake" oneself is at the heart of liberatory discourses of whiteness, including those who think of themselves as departing from the supremacist mould. This kind of identity-travel happens on the daily – including in yoga classes, in all-white sweat lodges, in hunting and fishing camps, in art galleries and social justice circles. It is a trope of ally-ship rarely divulged as such: to be able to move freely from one world to another, to "get" other peoples' pain, to "be there" for them under all circumstances, this all reeks of the kind of mobility whiteness takes for granted. And it is this, I believe, that, grasping for advantage, spurs both Pretendians and race-shifters on.[46]

46 A decision by the Supreme Court in 2019 states that the "Métis" have never existed in Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean. This decision led the members of the Communauté Métisse du domaine-du-Roy et de la Seigneurie de Mingan (CMDRSM) to change their name to "La Communauté autochtone du Domaine du Roy (CADR), making a new claim based on a broader notion of Indigeneity: "Our non-profit organization is

It is also this that creates the insatiable hunger, amongst those with white privilege, for the calling out of race-shifters and Pretendians. Pretendian investigations, as Anne Helen Peterson writes, tend to be "written by and framed for white people."[47] Not to be outplayed, in these battles for idealized difference, we often hear of the race-shifters shutting down white colleagues they say are not in a position to engage with race, setting themselves up as ideal speakers on issues of whiteness. The new police, Pretendians seem to know better than others how to perform the identity of their otherness, keeping any notion of the paraontological

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dedicated to the defence of the Indigenous interests of the descendants of Chicoutimi and Tadoussac that have occupied the historic territories of Saguenay and Charlebois without interruption since contact" (my translation). When one identity doesn't work, claim another one! This is whiteness. https://macotenord.com/deboute-comme-metis-un-groupe-du-saguenay-et-de-la-cote-nord-veut-se-faire-reconnaitre-comme-autochtone/.

47 Anne Helen Petersen, 2022. https://annehelen.substack.com/p/the-pattern-of-pretendianism. There is something else at work here, beyond the framing "for white people," which is a framing for whiteness. Whiteness, systemically understood, upholds dominant framings. The policing gesture becomes the norm.

at bay.[48] It's a battle of one-upmanship that depends on who can best uphold the current stereotype, who can best settle the argument on who gets to have the last word on Indigeneity.

The white-washed academy (and beyond) feeds on this. Cyca: "A lot of Pretendian stories are very sensational, for obvious reasons. No one can resist reading about a scam, and race-shifting stories tend to be especially wild. People who pretend to be Indigenous are pretty over-the-top about it. Carrie Bourassa[49] claimed she had been given the spirit name 'Morning Star Bear,' Adams claimed her Ojibwé ancestors spoke to her in dreams – it's like Indian cosplay, just stereotypes all the way down. That's worth calling out, but I also didn't want to tell a story that was just about the bizarre spectacle of identity fraud, or one that framed it as an individual transgression. Because what I learned at Emily Carr, and what is obvious from every other Pretendian story, is that people

48 On the paraontological, see Nahum Chandler, *X – The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (New York: Fordham UP, 2014). See also Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," in *Criticism* vol. 50, no. 2, 2008.

49 Michelle Cyca, "What is the Point of 'Pretendian' Investigations?" November, 2023. https://thewalrus.ca/pretendian-investigations/. See also: https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/carrie-bourassa-Indigenous.

are able to perpetuate their deception through leveraging the power and protection of *institutions*. That's why they're so hard to call out, and why they can evade consequences for so long. It's not just someone sneaking into a university and taking a job that wasn't meant for them; it's that university choosing to look the other way for as long as they can get away with it."[50]

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Finding one's way back to community in the wake of the fracturing of Indigenous connections due to residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous children in foster care, is not work that can be done through a checkbox. It cannot occur through an identity claim that upholds the very system that disenfranchised belonging in the first place. This is what Cyca's writing is at pains for demonstrate. Two modes work in countercurrent here, and the inability or unwillingness to tell them apart is telling. In the first, as regards questions of relocating family ties in an Indigenous context, the process involves the slow and careful

50 Anne Helen Petersen, 2022. https://annehelen.substack.com/p/the-pattern-of-pretendianism.

return to source, conversation by conversation, weaving connections to engender a field of relation not for identity but for emergent collectivity, for the renewal of forms of life stolen by colonization. The second, far more mediatized, involves the purchasing of Indigeneity's surplus-value (of life)[51] for individual benefit. "It took me three years to find my Indians, so it was a long time," says Ghislain Corneau, a member of Communauté Métis du Domaine du Roy et de la Seigneurie de Mingan (CMDRSM, inc. 2005). "I have to find the Indian and then I'll go get my cards."[52] The cards do the trick: "I consider myself less white than I did before [the treaty negotiations], because [the government] betrayed us." (Claude Pineault). In the Pretendian narrative, especially the one around "Métis" identity in Québec, the government looms large in the "reindigenizing" imagination. Had the government not "given" the lands away, there would have been no need to make the claim. "Those people are supposed to be there to represent us, to defend our rights"; "before the federal and

51 For an in-depth account of the concept of surplus-value of life, see Brian Massumi, *99 Theses for the Revaluation of Value* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2018).

52 https://maisonneuve.org/article/2018/11/1/self-made-metis/.

provincial governments' threats to deprive us of our property, we didn't have to make statements about our origins" (in Leroux).[53] Had the government just allowed us to keep grabbing land, the discourse suggests, none of this would have happened: *we wouldn't have had to grab it again*. "Kwe, Kwe, hello, I have known for a few weeks that I am part of this Métis community [CMDRSM] and I wanted to know whether our mother tongue is Algonquin? What I would like to know is the name for sun and light. Can someone help me? Meguetch" (Isabel Rancourt).[54]

The purchase of identity for surplus-value within a propertied commitment to whiteness is not a becoming. It is a usurping. Whether this occurs in the more "refined" discourse of the university, or in the context of the noble savage discourse that reduces Indigeneity to some idealized, new age, notion of the "spiritual," or some romanticized account of "nature," what occurs is not a process of transformation. Sure, there may be the sense that one has been changed, but the one who is changed is still the one. Two identities are grafted onto one another, one a

53 https://maisonneuve.org/article/2018/11/1/self-made-metis/.

54 https://www.facebook.com/CommunauteMetisse/.

self-entrepreneurial belief in the sanctity of personal advancement (entitlement, privilege, whiteness, neurotypicality), the other the belief that you deserve respite from any culpability in the generalized land grab your privilege has afforded you. Becoming Indian is no becoming. The graft is static. But, paradoxically, because nothing in the world is static, the graft will, in time, show its fault lines. There is no superposition without cleave.

To be claimed is altogether different. It is to be in the movement of a process that has no clear delineation. It is to feel the force of a movement of thought spark through you, shifting the you you assumed you were. To be claimed is to be transported into the power of the false, into that excessive terrain that refutes any reductive predisposition to identity. This, not because there is no history, no inheritance, but because history is never simply of the past. History is what takes the present with it, bestowing onto its shape-shifting singularity, its own signature of eventness. We are made by it, claimed by it, even as it shifts, in continual difference from itself. Because the past is never simply behind us, never simply that *which was*. Time is not a line. This is what the power of the false demonstrates, what it activates: that time

does not organize us from without, as though it were extra to our becoming. Time is the incompossibility that we also are: we are time's speciousness. Movement is what makes us, not a placid notion of before and after, as though the before-times held us firm as already-contained bearers of a certain account of the world. We were always moving – movement is all there is. And it is from here that we must understand becoming. Not becoming as something *we* do. Becoming as what the earth expresses in the molecular movements of its complex unfoldings. Becoming as the movement of thought that transforms any belief that there could have been a different way. The world is not made of forking paths we could go back and choose to follow otherwise as though living could be done in retrospect. The could-have-been has an effect on how the present unfolds, but it is not lived as such. The world, experience, is what becoming makes of it. We, the force of form of our encounter with change, are the movements that move with it. Becoming changes us, changes the "we" we believe we are, unsettles any I we imagined ourselves to be. "A becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 238).

Alfred North Whitehead marks a vital difference between what he calls "the continuity of becoming" and "the becoming of continuity" (1978). The continuity of becoming is an account of process that suggests that process moves along a continuous line in one long smooth flow. This is the most current use of becoming, and the way Deleuze and Guattari are often read. Process philosophy is never interested in this notion of becoming, however, recognizing as it does the Kantian presupposition at the heart of its geography: to have the continuity of becoming, you have to have an externalized notion of time. The world has to happen *in* time. What process philosophy is committed to is the "becoming of continuity," which is to say, the emergent redirection activated by difference. Henri Bergson's notion of duration is key here. Duration is not time measured, not the line of time. Duration is the density of time's texture, activated in the event.

The becoming of continuity always implies a certain redirection. A capture. A schizz. Process is only discernible as such through the actualization that propulses it from the welter. A becoming is the effect of an emergent deviation from what would otherwise remain backgrounded. This redirection produces new conditions for

experience. It generates new constellations. Relation is at the heart of this way of understanding becoming, relation not as interpersonality but as radical empiricism.[55] Relation is not the between-two, but the activity of differencing that shifts the conditions of any and all encounters. Before identity, and between it, there is always relation. Identity is a certain stopping-point of a relational weave, a sometimes useful shorthand for creating category. But it is always being unsettled by the relational webs it calls forth. Identity is placeholder. Nothing more.

When identity is claimed in a Pretendian situation, it is meant to settle (the case). The dangerous presupposition that becoming is something I has access to, that I *does*, moves these claims forward. And the refrain of "but they did become" that sometimes is evoked in the wake of Pretendian call-outs ("but he really was, kind of, Indigenous") only bolsters the notion that identity is something that is achieved, strengthening that appropriative whiteness that makes willful claims based on a belief that it owns the field of transformation. This is not becoming. It is propertying.

55 See William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

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"It wasn't just that I wanted to see Jess as Black. It was also that I didn't desire strongly enough that [...] part of me that *did not* see her as Black – that noticed and questioned and took up space at the expense of other people's imposing stories and lies, the Blackest part of me that was in conflict with my own lightness" (Hari Ziyad).[56]

In the propertying of identity, those tricked often ask themselves whether they should have known, or *how* they should have known. It can feel like a comment on their authenticity. What part of Ziyad was keeping him from the intuition of Krug's deception? What can he do differently now to safeguard his intuitive blackness for the future?

The question of how black, or where blackness lives in the context of race-shifting, is on a continuum with the issue of Pretendians, and should not be ignored in a province that is rife with a tendency to foreground its whiteness in accounts of who belongs.[57] For too long, Québec has fed its

56 https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2020/12/the-stories-and-lies-of-jess-krug.

57 On muslims and the wearing of the veil: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/24/quebecs-ban-religious-clothing-chilling-be-us-you-must-dress-us;
On anti-black racism in schools: https://

victim-centred stance regarding oppression by the English at the cost of negating their own, our own, colonizing impulses. If I am "Irish," imagine what happens to those who are Indigenous and Black, or even those who are simply, not white enough.

I spoke earlier of my partner B.'s unsettled experience of being-claimed by the identity he's never been. Half-Iranian by birth, but raised by a Hungarian-American mother in complete cultural separation from his father's side, his skin-tone nonetheless carries that brownness that at different times of his life (in geopolitical eras that foregrounded different accounts of otherness) has nationalized him away from his other half-roots, with which he most identifies. In different periods, he has been Italian or Spanish. Sometimes Japanese. In France: Algerian. More recently – since 9/11 – Muslim, possibly Arab (especially in airports). Unlike his brother, who read more emphatically as "Arab"

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montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/how-black-students-in-quebec-are-treated-differently-by-the-system;

On ethnic nationalism: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/12/how-did-quebecs-nationalist-movement-become-so-white; https://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/ethnic-nationalism-quebec-1.3960340.

(despite Iranians not being Arab, of course), who was called the n. word growing up, B. was never so obviously placeable. He was just *other enough* to stall people who encountered him, for them to do a double-take and ask him, once his skin and hair darkened in his late teens, where he was "really" from.

The thing is, B. was and continues to be completely uninterested in any claim that would set him apart, that would *humanize* (in the dehumanization) his difference. He is neither interested in the movement to "place" him through the racist question "where are you really from?" nor in the identity-enclosing group-culture often practiced in academia that would absolve him of his whiteness were he to finally admit to (and take on) his racialized status. He doesn't live in category. He is neither compelled by identity narratives that would allow him to disavow his white privilege on the basis of skin colour nor interested in building a persona based on abstractions of ancestry. He has not experienced the kind of racism he thinks would benefit from this kind of identity life-boat that would recenter him through recolonizing definitions of race. But as importantly, he is not interested in those kinds of gestures that organize bodies

into identities-at-a-distance, a move that is often especially tempting for those who pass as white-skinned but carry a tinge – just enough – of brown, a difference that would allow them to excuse themselves from the privileged class.

This doesn't mean B. hasn't been racialized, and that the racializing has no effects. In Québec, the effect of his visible difference has frustrated him no end. In a province where the pure laine discourse is motivated by access to (and the threat of losing) language, a lot occurs in the linguistic encounter. The slight tinge of my accent which displaces me from the centre is just one example of how language polices identity in Québec. For B. something similar is at work, but amplified. Despite his being fluent in French, despite beginning each francophone public encounter by speaking in French, he is almost always addressed in English, even when the speaker can barely speak the language. This even if he continues to speak in French. This daily aggravation, which many racialized people will confirm (the exception would be Haitians), has the paradoxical effect of discouraging racialized people from speaking French in a province that continuously bemoans the loss of the French language and blames "immigrants" (the easy way of segregating white Québécois from all others) for

not committing to French language and culture.[58] The difference between us and them is doubly

58 Language politics in Québec require their own book-length treatise. Bill 101, which became law in 1977, included the adoption of the Charter of the French Language, which states that all children must be educated in French until the end of their secondary studies (there are some exceptions, but these are few and far between). Bill 96, passed in 2022 and amended in 2024, expands those provisions, centring education and commerce, creating openings for individual citizens to file lawsuits that infringe on their right to service in French. (https://www.motionpoint.com/blog/bill-96/#). 2024 also saw the cut, in Québec, of funding to anglophone universities, despite the fact that a university like Concordia attracts a large population of francophone students who opt to study in English to strengthen their language but continue to function in day to day life in French. The nine million dollar reduction in funding further exacerbates existing language politics, which, amongst other things, reify the belief that Québec is a province made up only of English and French, denying the ongoing erasure of Indigenous languages. It is a short bridge from language politics to other forms of racism, including the policing of muslims and other visible minorities through Québec's secularism laws, modelled on those in France, which prohibit visible signs of religion in public office (despite the presence of the cross in the National Assembly), emboldening the us-them narrative that fosters the ethnic nationalism that has been at the forefront of the separatist movement in Québec since the second referendum in 1995, if not before.

marked by the refusal of sharing what is most perceived as being under threat, as though saying: no, your inclusion is not welcome, you are not, will never be, one of us. Brown skin is a marker, here, for the certainty of outsider status. To be fluent in French is not enough – you must speak from the angle of my Franco-Québécois colonizing history, in the inflections of pure laine status.

How the "enough" is meted out, and how it plays out in the register of identity, is never straightforward. B. is just racialized *enough* to be a problem. Where does this *enough* sit in Pretendian or race-shifting situations?

Ziyad seems troubled by this "enough." Why could he not sense that the enough was, in the end, not enough. Why couldn't he see, as many of his friends and colleagues had, that something was off? What is this off-ness that should have been sensed?

The undercurrent of Ziyad's rhetoric is that he should have been better capable of perceiving how his own blackness did not connect to, or properly feel into, Jessica Krug's pretend blackness. Did he not possess the kind of blackness that would protect him from the pretence, "blackness [...] all up in the bones – in the sinew."[59]

59 Denene Millner, 2017. https://www.npr.org/sections/

How we fit into the identities we wear is rarely straightforward. However much B. might wish for more nuance (his standard answer to "where are you from" is "the suburbs"), he is called on to respond to the public categorization of his purported identity not on his terms, but on theirs. The blond Hungarian mother is not visible in him, and so that experience is backgrounded in favour of some idealized, uncomplicated discussion of "roots," a discourse that sidles the very colonial categories he has always lived in refusal of.

The emphasis on roots, on disembodied accounts of blood quantum and ancestry, privileges a conversation around becoming that holds it captive to the line. Becoming, here, is directed by personal choice. "I identify as" is a common way of making this choice known, often under conditions of some duress, both in terms of the pain or shame of the person who is doing the defining, and the threat, from the other end, of being called out if you get the self-defining wrong. It's thorny business, digging into that narrative. But it has caused real harm in the context of race-shifting and Pretendianism, and is perhaps worth delving into in more detail to

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codeswitch/2017/03/03/518184030/why-rachel-dolezal-can-never-be-black.

recognize the neoliberal tendencies it can move into operation.

"I identify as" is a trope often organized through victim-centring narratives. I am pulled to my identification because where I was held me captive. It's a fine line between the force of becoming's movement and a belief that transformation occurs through a willful self-directing. Whiteness lurks here, when the self leads, because it is whiteness' prerogative to travel easily across genres of existence. This is not to say, never to say, that one should not metamorphose. It is to suggest that metamorphosis is not about settling into identity, propertying it. To be moved into a becoming is not only to be changed by it, but to live the disturbance of the very idea of settling. It is to be unsettled by the change that becomes us.

In race-shifting and Pretendian discourse, becoming is managed as a volitional act. "I" does the pretending. When Jessica Krug "became" Black, she took on a story that she wore, with some variation, to make herself Blacker than Black. Her story, as with many Pretendians, was born of bathos: abuse, pain, trauma. Over time, as she found herself living-out her new identity in different contexts, it morphed, and these new dimensions of her experience had to be grafted

on. What didn't change, however, was her wilful refusal to sidestep the self-centredness she had mistaken for blackness, making herself the spokesperson for race to the degree that required the policing of any perception of whiteness in her surrounds. She held the reigns, building an identity narrative everywhere she went as a kind of calling card for her centrality in any and all accounts of race. The irony, and this will be the case for all race-shifters, is that in the end it was the self-centring of and in identity that took her down: identity becomes a brittle marker of dissonance when it is centred this way. Identity just can't be held in place. It will always shapeshift with the world's own production of subjectivity. To hold identity to itself is to settle the self in a fierce commitment to staying in the same place. When identity becomes too rigid, it takes a police corps to hold it in place. And as we all know, you can't trust the police.

But is the way out of this stranglehold of identity the reification of some kind of essentialist sense of blackness? "The story of Jessica Krug is a story about how there *is* something special and tangible about Blackness that all Black people feel innately" (Ziyad).[60]

60 https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2020/12/

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That there is something special, and singular, about blackness is not in doubt, but that it carries some kind of essentialist germ that should be able to be recognized in others seems to narrow it down to an ontological certainty, to the very objectification it has always resisted, been the very resistance of (Moten 2004). Blackness is the affront to this desire to contain race, to reduce it to typology, to some kind of sovereign expression of its settling. As Jared Sexton underscores, leaning into Chandler and Moten, blackness emerges through the commitment of the *un*sovereign, through the figure of abolition. "No ground for identity, no ground to stand (on). Everyone has a claim to everything until no one has a claim to anything. No claim. This not a politics of despair brought about by a failure to lament a loss, because it is not rooted in hope of winning. The flesh of the earth demands it: the landless inhabitation of selfless existence" (2016, 596).

Identification is murky precisely because it is a false problem. In Glissant's well-known formulation "to consent not to be a single being," a

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the-stories-and-lies-of-jess-krug.

doubleness is heard. Consent here is not personal consent. This is not "my" consent. Consent itself is opened up by the field of relation. And in this open field, the single being does not exist. Poetics of relation propulses experience, in an aesthetics of the earth.[61] This is the threat of blackness, that it cannot be reduced to a taxonomy, into the endgame that it has been subjected to for the last half century. Blackness escapes. It is fugitive. Identity can't claim it.[62]

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61 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1997). For a more detailed engagement with the question of an aesthetics of the earth in the context of paraontological accounts of race, see also Erin Manning, *The Being of Relation* (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2025).

62 Patrick Chamoiseau writes: "Amerindians, Békés, Indians, Negroes, Chinese, Mulattos, Madeirians, Syrian-Lebanese… We wanted to preserve purities of origin but we saw ourselves traversed by each other. The Other changes me and I change them. Their contact animates me and I animate them. And this throwing out of joint offers us angles of survival, revealing us, and amplifying us. Every Other becomes a component of me even while remaining distinct. I become what I am in my open leaning in toward the Other. And this relation to the Other opens me to cascades of infinite relations to all Others, a multiplication that founds the unity and the force of each individual: Creolisation! Creoleness! In Martiniquan Creoleness each Me contains an open share of Others, and at the edging of each Me there

This complicates questions of Indigeneity in the Afro-Indigenous community in North America. To quote Sexton again: "Abolition, the political dream of Black studies, its unconscious thinking, consists in the affirmation of the unsovereign slave – the affectable, the derelict, the monstrous, the wretched – figures of an order altogether different from (even when they coincide or cohabit with) the colonized Native: the occupied, the undocumented, the unprotected, the oppressed. Abolition is beyond (the restoration of) sovereignty. Beyond the restoration of a lost commons through radical redistribution (everything for everyone), there is the unimaginable loss of that all too imaginable loss itself (nothing for no one). If the Indigenous relation to land precedes and exceeds any regime of property, then the slave's inhabitation of the earth precedes and exceeds any prior relation to land – landlessness. And selflessness is the correlate" (109).

State-sanctioned criteria for inclusion and exclusion into community cannot but be infected by state sovereignty, despite Indigenous sovereignty's contestation of colonial definitions of

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remains a shimmering share impenetrable to Others. I left ancient identity there, in an acme of dreams (1997, 202; my translation).

land and property. The state subject can't help but infiltrate through the edges of discourse of modes of inclusion like blood quantum, for instance. This becomes complex in Afro-Indigenous attempts to reconnect with community. "Afro-Indigenous people have faced complex government laws and social constructs such as blood quantum laws and the one-drop rule. […] This has forced many Afro-Indigenous people to 'deny' their Indigeneity, which has significantly decreased tribal enrollment."[63] Colourism often also comes up in discourses around membership of Black folks in Indigenous communities, along with a strong sense of erasure.[64] Dakota historian, Philip Deloria, traces some of the history of anti-Black exclusion from tribal nations in the US context: "In 1979, an Oklahoma woman named Johnnie Mae Austin stopped getting mail from the Muscogee Nation. There were no more announcements of meetings, notices of elections, or news of monetary settlements. The problem wasn't postal. Austin's Muscogee citizenship had been erased by a new Muscogee

63 https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/afro-indigenous-intersectionality.

64 Idem.

constitution in which citizenship was defined 'by blood,' words that named a fraught crossroads in Native and African American histories. The Muscogee people, also referred to as Creeks, were among the tribes that once enslaved people of African descent and that were required, in the wake of the Civil War, to accept them as tribal citizens. A tribal enrolment census around the start of the 20th century split the Muscogee citizenry into groups that were separate but by no means equal. One roll – the 'by blood' roster – listed people of Creek heritage, while a second, 'freedmen,' roll named Black Creek citizens, the formerly enslaved and their descendants. Austin's ancestors appeared on the second roll. With the new constitution, Muscogee citizenship was reserved for those on the first roll, or their lineal descendants. And so Austin, after forty-seven years of being Creek, found her tribal identity legally and politically erased."[65] Racially-restricted rules were

65 Deloria continues: "In the terse summary of Buddy Cox, a twenty-first-century Creek (and the nephew of an influential chief), 'We owned some, we were some, and we slept with some.'" https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/07/25/when-tribal-nations-expel-their-black-members-caleb-gayle-we-refuse-to-forget-alaina-e-roberts-ive-been-here-all-the-while.

subsequently imposed in the Choctaw nation (1983), the Oklahoma Seminoles (2000) and the Cherokee Nation (2007).[66]

What is Johnnie Mae Austin's claim? Is she non-Indigenous because she can't lay claim to a traditional lineage, traditional in the sense of unbroken? Isn't that the very definition of colonial time, now reimposed on Indigenous belonging? The complexities abound. Take the case of George Elliott Clarke, who identifies as Indigenous Black in Eastern Canada. In a response to the accusation of the appropriation of Indigeneity (Clarke refers to himself as Indigenous to Canada, and also as AfroMétis), he explains that his use of the term Indigenous distinguishes him from more recent Black arrivals to Canada. "I probably first began to use the phrase myself then, for, as I was beginning to voyage beyond Nova Scotia, I began to encounter brother and sister blacks from other parts of the African Diaspora, who would wonder, like many white folks, just who the hell was I, anyway, and what strange black culture did I possess, when bagpipes could make me weep

66 https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/07/25/when-tribal-nations-expel-their-black-members-caleb-gayle-we-refuse-to-forget-alaina-e-roberts-ive-been-here-all-the-while.

almost as sentimentally as any Motown hurtin' song."[67] Clarke goes on to explain that he means no harm to "the real Indigenous people, the Mi'kmaq," nor is he "out to erase their claim to original presence, to an absolute Indigeneity."[68] What he was trying to do was to differentiate himself culturally from newer Black Canadians "because we were, in fact, different, despite our allegiance to the rhetoric of pan-Africanism."[69] It is here that it gets complicated: "our difference," Clarke continues, "was native."[70]

Native, for Clarke, refers to the absence of nativity for Black Canadians who "could not look back only one generation to some other native land where we were either the majority or could wield significant power. Nor could we appeal to any foreign embassy to intervene with the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia to address our concerns."[71] "Too," he continues, "save for relatively isolated Preston and its environs, we were – are – visibly, multiply Coloured – especially in the Annapolis Valley, on the South Shore,

67 https://afrometis.ca/Indigenous-blacks-an-irreconcilable-identity/.
68 Idem.
69 Idem.
70 Idem.
71 Idem.

in the Nor'east, and even in the Capital itself. Our 'blackness' is indelibly Métis – brown, tan, copper, gold, yellow, indigo, ivory, blue, even white."[72]

In Clarke's neologism "Africadian," the suffix "cadie" is Mi'kmaw and means "abounding in": "Africadia means, literally, (a place) abounding in Africans. Far from articulating an inaccurate vision of African Nova Scotians as all being Afro-Acadiens (though some Africadians are, indeed, 'Afro-Acadiens'), I was and am, in my neologism, signalling our attachment to Mi'kmaw territory."[73]

Clarke is accused by Paula C. Madden of claiming "the land and territory of Mi'kma'ki."[74] Clarke's response is to return to the problem of the dispossession from land of *both* the Nova Scotia Africans and the Indigenous population, claiming his identity at that interstice: "I'm grounded, I got a sense of identity … and that's what I was trying to name, by giving a specific name tied to our geographical presence. I'm not going to say possession, because I'm also part Indigenous and … I do not believe the treaties were ever actually conducted between equal partners or in good faith. I will make an exception

72 Idem.
73 Idem.
74 Idem.

for Black communities, because we never had any choice. It's not as if we arrived en masse and started grabbing land from people … Our ancestors back in Nova Scotia, they were deliberately given the very worst land possible so they could not become economically independent. And that land was often next to an Indigenous reserve, and people ended up mixing."[75]

How many ways of making the claim is there room for? And how nimble is the discourse, especially when anti-black racism infiltrates it? Ciann L. Wilson and Ann Marie Beals, both Afro-Indigenous, are concerned: "In response to the overwhelming number of white pretendians fraudulently claiming Indigenous identity, many institutions and organizations have implemented more rigorous protocols asking people who claim to be Indigenous to verify their identities through mechanisms such as status cards and community connections. Protocols ensuring that resources and opportunities for Indigenous people are given to Indigenous people with relationships to their communities are important and necessary. But, if not done thoughtfully, we worry the protocols

75 https://www.everythingzoomer.com/zed-book-club/2021/09/24/george-elliott-clarke-where-beauty-survived/.

will further isolate Afro-Indigenous people from their communities and exclude them from opportunities and resources intended for Indigenous people. It could cause the doubling-down of paper genocide – i.e. the disappearing of Indigenous peoples through settler-legislated definitions and documentation as "proof" of Indigeneity – in the vein of the Indian Act."[76]

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Kim TallBear opts for "Pretendian" over "race shifting" when speaking of the theft of Indigeneity in order to underscore that not all Pretendians are white. "Not all false or exaggerated 'Native American,' 'Métis,' 'Cherokee' and other Indigenous claims are made by white people. […] [C]an a Black person simply leave their racialization as Black behind because they start to identify also or instead as Native?" she asks.[77]

Some would accuse George Elliott Clarke of making false claims, if not in terms of his Indigeneity per se, then as regards the nomenclature of AfroMétis he uses to describe Africadians.

76 https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/making-space-for-afro-Indigenous-community.

77 https://kimTallBear.substack.com/p/Indigenous-race-shifting-red-flags#details.

A member of the Eastern Woodlands Métis Nation of Nova Scotia (EWMNNS), Clarke maintains the Métis status in the specific case of Afro-Indigenous Métissage. "I joined the EWMNNS in 2010. Why? So that my daughter (who also has some Native heritage on her Québécois mother's side), if she so chooses, might explore this inheritance when she is older."[78]

Darryl Leroux: "Eastern Woodland Métis Nation Nova Scotia has openly opposed Mi'kmaw sovereignty and self-determination in Mi'kma'ki. It also has documented record of encouraging its members to use their cards for fraudulent purposes."[79] Nova Scotia suffers from a similar problem as does Québec, with many recent fraudulent Métis organizations: "the number of people who call themselves Métis soared 125% in Nova Scotia from 2006–2016."[80]

The Eastern Woodlands Métis Nation of Nova Scotia, led by tribal chief Mary Lou Parker, has "grown exponentially to 30000 members" in the last decade, creating a "profoundly divisive

78 https://afrometis.ca/Indigenous-blacks-an-irreconcilable-identity/.

79 https://twitter.com/DarrylLeroux/status/1196088379693248512?lang=en.

80 Idem.

debate" in Eastern Canada.[81] Says Mi'kmaw elder and historian Daniel Paul: "When you're looking at the Maritimes and Québec, the children of intermarriage were accepted by either party, in our case the Mi'kmaq or the Acadian. There was no such thing as a Métis community here in the region."[82] The rebuttal, for many, returns to questions of race: "We were forced to assimilate with white people, our identities stolen. Now we're reclaiming our native heritage" (Parker).[83]

TallBear: "false claims to Indigenous ancestry/identity happen across racial groups. That said, the foundation of playing Indian and Indigenous appropriations is white supremacy."[84] In TallBear's vocabulary, Peoplehood is not a race – "I think seeing Peoplehood as just that (as not a race), but as intersecting with race is the truest way to see things and I try to emphasize

81 https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/the-controversial-rise-of-the-eastern-metis-where-were-these-people-all-this-time-1.4680105.

82 https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/the-controversial-rise-of-the-eastern-metis-where-were-these-people-all-this-time-1.4680105.

83 Idem.

84 https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/we-are-not-your-dead-ancestors?utm_source=/search/black%20pretendian&utm_medium=reader2#details.

that in my language."[85] TallBear cleaves race and peoplehood to demonstrate the difference in perception of Pretendians and race-shifters. "Some of the same institutions or individuals that were quick to condemn Dolezal or Krug were also either silent on or defending Andrea Smith all over social media."[86] Her view is that "this has everything to do with the fact that redness is viewed as absorbable by whiteness while [...] Black and white are defined as a binary condition."[87]

When Ziyad, speaking of being racially tricked by Krug, writes that "I did not know my body could be right," he is reaching for that "blackness [...] all up in the bones – in the sinew" (Miller).[88] What is this *feel*? "Yes, it has a look," he says. "I would like to think I am better at recognizing it now. I would like to think I will always do the uncomfortable work to get better at recognizing it for the rest of my life."[89]

The pain heard in Ziyad's account returns us

85 https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/Indigenous-race-shifting-red-flags#details.

86 Idem.

87 Idem.

88 https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/03/03/518184030/why-rachel-dolezal-can-never-be-black.

89 https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2020/12/the-stories-and-lies-of-jess-krug.

to the quagmire of recognition. What is it to be claimed by a people? Is it felt? Is it given? How does one learn – even as Black – to be in the becoming of its offer, of its worlding?

Shortly after the outing of Rachel Dolezal as a race-shifter, Kai M. Green wrote: "We are all responding to the question: Is she black or nah? We have too easily answered this question with a resounding NAH! But I think that's the wrong question. The question we should be asking is when was/is she black?"[90]

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In becoming, a life-altering turn becomes possible, a turn like the turn of milk into butter. In this turn, nothing remains as it was: there is no easy path through which the butter can return to milk. The question of "when she was/is black" detours us into this turn by refusing the easy binary that identitarian forms of thought would prefer we settle the case with, once and for all. To come into the turn, to be in the time of the turn, is to learn to ask other questions. Cedric

90 Marquis Bey & Theodora Sakellarides, "When We Enter: the Blackness of Rachel Dolezal, The Black Scholar," 46:4 (2016): 33–48.

Robinson writes: "The notion of black radicalism does not have borders, boundaries, racial qualifications, et cetera. […] I want to remind you of another young person: Rachel Dolezal. Her story was only told in bits and pieces. She was accused (by the professional Blacks on national television) of having stolen the pain of Black women, appropriated the pain of Black women, imitated the pain of Black women. That was an obscenity – those charges. It turns out that she was just responding to a number of wounds inflicted upon her and her foster siblings by her parents, and they came out after her by challenging her identity. She never pretended to be African-American. She constantly told the interviewers (whether they could hear it or not) that she was Black. Black. Not Afro-American, not African-American, not Negro. Black. And she paid for that privilege."[91]

Marquis Bey and Theodora Sakellarides take up the challenge raised by Robinson's comments, spoken during a public talk. How to engage paraontologically without resettling the grab? What might it imply to dwell in the question of *how* (at what cost?). How to move the question of "is she, or isn't she" toward a place that isn't

91 https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=7tYobwc-lsE.

committed to generalization, while remaining sensitive to the ease of theft, the careless appropriation of what in any case has always been assumed to be reducible to the I of propertied ownership: whiteness? And how to do that without, at the same time, suggesting that there isn't pain caused by the act, that it doesn't hurt to feel you've been tricked, or that some one has benefitted from your trauma? Or, and, how to shift the discourse entirely out of the personal, away from me and you, to move to an ecology of thought and practice that isn't determined by the enclosures foisted upon us, by the limited responses a situation like this calls forth. How to not be choreographed by the reductive arena of thought and action it encloses, it forecloses. Can it not be *about* Rachel Dolezal?

Reducing blackness to the form it takes when contoured by whiteness, when settled by ontology, organizes it according to colonial definitions of race, shrinking it to the shape of individual experience. Making blackness a person territorializes the atmospheres that enfold it, that extend and exceed it. From aesthetics of the earth to biological construct, blackness is made into what it is not: the other to valued existence, the other to whiteness. Blackness is as systemic in its racial

contours as it is in the sociality it produces, in the poetics of relation – difference without separability – it capacitates. To reduce it to a form, to a predisposition, dampens its paraontological force, capturing its fugitivity. This is not to say that racial fatigue, or Black fatigue, is ever far away, that it isn't a daily threat to heart health, not to speak of mental health, nor to suggest that blackness doesn't carry with it the violent daily reminder of how colonial constructs remain the preferred weapons of white supremacy.[92]

When Green asks *when* Dolezal was black, a durational shift occurs. The predisposed loses its anchor. *Whose* time, *whose* earth? In white supremacist time, Dolezal's act has a contour that can be interpreted, that will be interpreted, as for or against, but outside of that time, what else is at stake? A turbulent field shifts the contours of experience with the refusal that there ever was one world, one way, one time. Here, in the schizz, the question is not "is" Dolezal black. The question is what quality of procession took her with it?[93] When was she caught in the

92 https://www.heart.org/en/news/2022/02/24/understanding-black-fatigue-and-how-to-overcome-it.

93 "The earth moves against the world. And today the response of the world is clear. The world answers in fire and flood. The more the earth churns the more

momentum of the "we are the moving, blackened, blackening earth" (Moten and Harney 2017). When, and *how*?

These are stormy shores. It's a fine line and not one I particularly want to dance on. But, in the procession, in the moving, what are the conditions through which there might have been an opening, in the systemic field of *a* Rachel Dolezal, one could call black? Is there a cleave, in Dolezal's claim to blackness (not African-American identity) for the generativity of blackness to become expressive, to do some kind of work (beyond identity)? Is there a way to engage with the question of how blackness moves to ask about the "consent not to be a single being" (Glissant)?[94] This, not to get "to the bottom of things," or to justify anything. Just to see where and how a when-ness can emerge that feels black in its paraontological refusal to condemn itself to the logic of colonialism?

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vicious the world's response. But the earth still moves. Tonika Sealy Thompson might call it a procession. The earth's procession is not on the world's calendar. It is not a parade on a parade ground. It is not in the world's teleology." Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, "Base Faith," eflux 86, 2017. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/86/162888/base-faith/.

94 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1997).

Might Dolezal have sidled it, or have been in some kind of relation to it, in a way that gave her life? Perhaps through the care of siblings, and later children who she loved, blackly, siblings she protected from whiteness? That she claimed Black, and took up others' position in her appropriation of it – that is definitely not black. But perhaps, as Robinson suggests, blackness did offer some openings, some paths, out of the whiteness she says she always rejected, a whiteness that seems to also have rejected her.

I am not defending Dolezal. I am simply pointing out, as Robinson does, that blackness is more fierce, more capacious, more *open*, than any one encampment of it. This is the potency of blackness' fugitivity, as articulated by so many thinkers, from Campt to Hartman, Moten to Akomolafe, Robinson to Harney, Chandler to Davis, du Bois to Bradley, da Silva and Crawley, to name only a few. In the words of Stuart Hall and Mark Sealy, as foregrounded by Bey and Sakellarides: "'Black' does not index a particular fixed group, the members of which being essentialized and static across time and place. Black is not determined, or reduced to, skin colour, genetics, or biological inheritance, though these do indeed factor into how one understands oneself, and how others

understand racialized people, as 'Black' or not. Blackness 'does not invoke an essentialized cultural identity, automatically frozen in time, which is automatically transmitted into the work, and can thus be held to 'represent' collectively all those who belong to a particular 'race,' ethnic community of tradition." Black is "a politically, historically and constructed category; a *contested* idea, whose ultimate destination remains *unsettled*" (2016, 37; my emphasis).

In a paraontological account of blackness, blackness *unfixes*. When Akomolafe speaks of becoming-black this is what he is gesturing toward – the unsettlement that is blackness, its refusal of the categorical imperative of identity that has trapped it in the colonizing narrative it still sometimes tends toward when it becomes capitalized as Black.[95] In Bey and Sakellarides' words, channeling Moten: "Blackness escapes into a territory other than itself, and it is precisely this movement, this escaped air from the enframing vestibule, […] that makes it what it is: [b]lack" (37).

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95 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUXSjBMn94U.

I've hit a wall with R.'s Joseph Lépine. I even gave in, yesterday, and spent fifty vouchers to have *mesaieux.com* get me more information. I have now committed to 744 ancestors.

In the interim, while I was wondering about the Lépine of R.'s lineage, it occurred to me that R.'s great-great-great-grandfather shares his name with a murderer in Québec, Mark Lépine, who killed fourteen women and injured ten others at the École Polytechnique in Montréal in 1989. "You're all a bunch of feminists, and I hate feminists" he yelled before opening fire. December 6 has become a provincial holiday in Québec and every year we mourn anew not only the femicide, but the ongoing hatred against women in the university and beyond, a hatred that has not only not abated, but is always taking on new forms, in the afterlife of slavery. Strange that it took me so long to connect them. This is what happens when a figure becomes a gateway to a better world. You forget the world you live in.

What's in a name? The figure of Joseph Lépine has taken on the hue of mystery from the beginning. When I began searching for Indigenous names in Québec, Lépine was one of the first I found. And Lépine is R's mother's maiden name. We were on our way! Lépine, I learned,

is a surname of Cree, Iroquois, French, and Scottish mixed-heritage in the regions of Alberta, Manitoba, Québec and Saskatchewan. A Joseph Lépine was one of the original French Canadian Lépines to arrive in Red River, Manitoba in 1822, from Saint-Jacques-de-l'Achigan.[96] Before I had sorted things out in the confusing geography of genealogy, I thought they were speaking about *our* Red River (*Rivière-Rouge*), the river an hour or so away from Sainte-Anne-du-Lac, in the area where the Weskarini lived in that period.

I still can't figure it out – was that Joseph Lépine in any way connected to R.'s Joseph Lépine, great-great-grandfather, who also had a son Joseph? I suppose I'd need to do a side genealogy to find out. I don't have enough vouchers (or patience) left. So with my last fifty vouchers I find out what I already suspect: R.'s Joseph Lépine can't be the Manitoba Red River Lépine. He was born much later, on January 25, 1833, but in the same place – at Saint-Jacques-de-l'Achigan, Québec – to Stanislas Chevoyer-Lepine and Emilie Auge. I have twenty-one vouchers left and the site is signalling that I could add

96 https://acanadianfamily.wordpress.com/2021/07/15/lepine-cree-iroquois-mixed-heritage-cree-french-scottish-surname-anchor-post/.

15304 ancestors going back to 1608, including 1995 children, for a total of $4082. If I wanted to splurge, I could also add five celebrities for $100. But I am done. I will figure out how to use the last $21 and close this chapter. I don't think we will ever really know who R.'s Joseph Lépine was, except that he had a grandson, Ildège, who took his daughter out into the forest and taught her many things about the land that she would carry forth, sharing them with her second youngest son, R. and in that relation he would find a sliver of potential that would make life bearable when everything else felt impossible.

The power of the false is not reducible to truth and lies. There really are two red rivers, and there are two Joseph Lépine who are born in the same place. For about a day I was certain they were the same person. This brief certainty grew exciting fabulations, not so much about R. *being* Indigenous as about his not having to be trapped in the family lineage that has done him such harm. Soon I realized I had the rivers mixed up, as well as the timelines. But that sliver of an opening onto a different conjunction, that compossibility, the doubling-over of time on itself, did do something. It compelled us to move elsewhere, R. and me, in our conversation about

what it means to continue to live out settler colonialism's propertying of existence.

It's a strange and powerful thing, the way fabulation crafts paths toward lives intercalating. As a child, I was a master fabulator. I spent years of my childhood in the fields of the farm where I spent my summers growing up, lying down looking at the clouds, in deep and sustained imaginary conversation with journalists about being a princess from a royal family. Whole complex scenarios that I returned to regularly were crafted, most of them interview-style, during which I typically performed both roles. Over years – perhaps between the ages of seven and thirteen – this fabulation grew a world that made daily life more bearable. Sometimes there were film reels, and I would find myself acting out many roles in a complex account of an extended family that loved me dearly and took me on great adventures, most of whom, for a reason I can't make sense of today, lived in a long-ago Luxembourg of royal families and castles. Every day, when I went out after breakfast, we would start again, from the beginning, the story bending toward new details but for the most part replaying itself. There was great relief, in the telling – I remember that, feel it, even now. The retelling made it real, somehow, fabulated interview

after fabulated interview. I never told anyone about this ritual, but sometimes, inadvertently, caught, still, in the interstices of the fabulation, I would tell someone I came from far away, from another family, another world, another time.

Eventually I found my way back to my "own" story, which is to say, the one that I was supposed to stick to. It had become painfully clear that the fabulatory flights, when inadvertently disclosed, were seen as lies. I understood that there was something "wrong" with me that I believed I lived elsewhere. I was told that I had to learn to recognize what was real. In time, the *feel* of that elsewhere muted. But it never completely left me. I've always known that place, that locality, doesn't quite pin us down.

Fabulations always carry a seed of what in moral language would be called "truth." They come from somewhere, in germ. The difference from myth-making is that the somewhere retains that quality of the germ. This is their power of the false: their capacity, in the world-making, of not reducing the flight to a situatedness that would irrevocably hold them down. They must take flight, must navigate worlds in the making, taking on the quality of existence lived. This makes them both true and false. They are true to the extent that they

produce modes of existence that are felt, that are real. They are true in the sense that they reflect something real about the situation the fabulator finds themselves in. They are false to the degree that they are not bound to a sense-making apparatus that fits into a preexisting frame – that their conditions may well belie the site from which they fly.

It wasn't unusual in my childhood to be called a liar, or, in relation to my father's similarly fabulatory tendencies, an exaggerator. This was clearly a moral failing. I should *stick to the truth*. Sticking to the truth means living in the frame that encapsulates, that knows the boundary of things, that is certain about *the way things are*.

Sometimes the way things are just isn't livable.

Somewhere along the line, as a small child, I think I heard a story about Holland and royalty, about a relative and a princess. Or maybe it was Luxembourg. That little seed germinated, down the line, to make me the family I needed at that time. There, where a child with wild hair and an anxious body could be integrated, I found a way into some kind of extension of family. I never denied my own, and never blamed them. It wasn't necessary – I had a way out.

Eventually, to create the path for the way out, I began to write. "The power of words is

accidental magic," Clarke writes. "Writing is thought fleshed out in characters of ink or darkened light. Once it is set down, it is only as perishable as the language in which it is expressed. And, identity itself is only the diction that one wields. Who you are is your vocabulary. Period."[97]

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Fugitive Pieces (Anne Michaels, 1996) tells the story of Athos, Jacob and Ben, three Jews in a search for "home" in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The story takes place mostly in Toronto, where they eventually find refuge. In my book *Ephemeral Territories* (2004) I linger on the question of what it might mean to be "beyond accommodation," outside of the regulatory (state-sanctioned) mortgaged enclosure that is called "home."

Fugitive Pieces fabulates home in the fissures of pain almost too bright to bear. "If I could draw, I'd hold a square of paper up to this view from your window and let the landscape burn into it, seep into it like a grasp leaving its stain, like

97 https://www.mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/MediaRoom/Stories/2022/02/the-power-of-words-is-accidental-magic.htm.

photosensitive paper turning dark with desire for the place one will never apprehend" (268). "I'm a thief who has climbed in through a window only to find himself struck frozen by a feeling of homecoming. The impossibility of it; the luck" (178).

"One can look deeply for meaning or one can invent it" (146). "Never trust biographies" (141).

Worlds grow through intercessors. Intercessors are germinal lures that move expression into act. We never speak for ourselves. This is the black hole Pretendians fall into – the belief that they are them-selves, wholly contained by the image they have settled into. This takes tremendous work to uphold, the image ultimately nothing more than a mise en abîme that threatens to dissolve should the latest detail not fit the frame. It is full-time work to hold the intercessors at bay.

Speaking of fabulation, Québec filmmaker Pierre Perrault talks of the "act of legending." The concept of the power of the false, and its relation to the intercessor, comes to life in Pierre Perrault's film – with Michel Brault – *Pour la suite du monde* (1963). The film is a reenactment, written and acted by the townspeople, of the traditional practice of hunting Beluga whales on the island in Québec where they live

(L'Isle-aux-Coudres).[98] A dissonant fabulation ensues: the story unfolds around an impasse. For some, the hunt had First Nations roots. For others, it came directly from God.

No final truth emerges from Perrault's film. "In proposing to the townspeople of L'Isle-aux-Coudres to recreate the beluga whale hunt that was practiced there until 1924, the filmmakers

98 This mode of filmmaking was revolutionary, with its "cinéma vérité focus on allowing the '"real" to speak' (laisser parler le réel)." "The aim was not to script the film and have the townspeople act as pawns in it, but – thanks to light cameras, updated microphones and celluloid that was more sensitive to natural light – to be in the midst of people telling their own story." (https://ici.radio-canada.ca/ohdio/premiere/emissions/aujourd-hui-l-histoire/segments/entrevue/28524/pour-la-suite-du-monde-pierre-perreault-michel-brault-onf-festival-de-cannes-andre-lavoie-cinema-direct). Perrault speaks of the work as "decolonial," to the degree that the act of legending is directed in the event, by the people (https://ici.radio-canada.ca/tele/cinema/blogue/1879007/pour-la-suite-du-monde--memoire-patrimoine-cinema-documentaire-perrault). He speaks of "catching the unexpected as it emerges" (https://ici.radio-canada.ca/tele/cinema/blogue/1879007/pour-la-suite-du-monde--memoire-patrimoine-cinema-documentaire-perrault). For a contemporary engagement with practices of collective fabulation in cinema, see also Michael MacDonald, *Cineworlding* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023).

– who live on the island sharing in the everyday with those they are filming – … retrieved gestures, as though inscribed in collective memory." These came to life "in the gaze of a complicit camera. Better, through the screen they bring a people into existence."[99]

To bring a people into existence is always a fabulatory act. Or, said differently, there is, in the peopling of existence, only fabulation. Anything else is settling. This is not to say that there aren't traditions, and inheritances. It is, rather, to underscore that the peopling is always *in the act*. Anything else gridlocks existence. *Pour la suite du monde* resists the gridlock not by denying the dissonance – the population just can't agree and this won't be papered over. It resists it by creating a thirdness, a *legending* that functions as a parastrata in the geology of that world. This thirdness carries a new angle of truth in the event of the town's history, in the regime of the power of the false. Nothing is solved, but the event that is created in the communal telling crafts a certain emergent collectivity, the feeling of a new way of coming together, through story.

99 https://ici.radio-canada.ca/tele/cinema/blogue/1879007/pour-la-suite-du-monde—memoire-patrimoine-cinema-documentaire-perrault.

The camera as intercessor brings the community into creative dissensus, magnifying a potent truth of its own: that how history is told in Québec carries, always, the legacy of colonialism. The camera doesn't solve the problem, it engenders a new one: how to tell this story despite the disagreement? Fabulations emerge in the dissonance when there is opportunity to leave aside the hard enclosure of absolute truths. In the generative encounter with expression as its own motor, a collectivity of thought and action is born.

Perrault was concerned about taking on the mantle of the colonizer in the filmmaking. Sharing the camera was his way of avoiding the privilege being behind the camera (as an outsider) affords. He didn't want to replay established discourse. The story he seeks is not legible in the thickest lines, in the dominant accounts of history – it's felt in the minor variations of an unfolding fabulation that escapes the tellers. "Then a minority discourse, with one or many speakers, takes shape" (Deleuze 1989, 125).

Fabulation is always minority discourse. There is no great reveal, no moral lesson, in fabulation. "We here come upon what Bergson calls 'fabulation.' Catching people in the act of legending is

to seize the movement of constitution of a people. A people does not preexist. In a way, a people is what's missing, as Paul Klee used to say. [...] It corresponds exactly to what Pierre Perrault calls being caught in the act of legending. There is no people that doesn't constitute itself this way" (Deleuze, 125–126).

By forcing us into the regime of myth-making, Pretendians and race-shifters mute the trickster potential of fabulation. Before long, the discussion is about enclosure: how to be certain, in advance of any nuance, who is in, and who is out. If not in the search of hard truths – prove your blood quantum, show us your cards – than in terms of *feeling*. Our bodies should not be able to deceive us. We should *know*.

The problem is: knowing, for sure, without the wiggle room of uncertainty, without the schizz of all those minor variations, is buying into colonizing modes of knowledge. "There's no truth that doesn't pre-suppose a system of symbols, be they only coordinates" (Deleuze, 126). The *Indian Act* was not set up to protect Indigeneity.[100] It was set

100 In "subversive identities: indigenous cultural politics and canadian legal frameworks, or, indigenous orphans of the state," Peter Kulchyski writes of the "complex and sometimes hidden impacts that such legislation has had for indigenous populations in the past. [...] what

up to protect whiteness. What it couldn't enclose, reserve, set apart, were those fabulatory qualities of life-living that bring the more-than to expression, including all the complex ways "all our relations" can reshape what it means to belong.

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One cannot become an Indian anymore than one can become a cat. One cannot become Black. But one can be alive in their becoming, attuned to the

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was intended by the totalizing regime as a mechanism for absorption of the indian into the body politic was subverted and used, by indians themselves, as a mechanism to legally affirm their distinctiveness and separation from the body politic." Kulchyski's argument is that "indians [...] did not share [the act's] ethnocentric assumptions" and while some wanted to be recognized within that system of "value," they did so not on the basis of the colonizer's categories, but to uphold their own account of being "indian." "even though the indian act came to articulate a whole host of repressive policies, indians determined to bear the weight of those rather than to surrender their legally enshrined recognition." As Kulchyski emphasizes, "in this, as in other elements of the application of a colonial regime, it is possible to read in the traces of policy and lawmaking the lineaments of resistance." See https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-62/6-2-essays/e62-essay-ubversive-identities-indigenous-cultural-politics-and-canadian-legal-frameworks-or.html

fugitivities of their resonance. Here, though, one is not "I." Movement-moves.

Form makes docile. When B. is identified as racialized, his body hardens into the shape that identification takes. In that moment, the field hardens and all he can be is the body *he is*.

Becoming is not born of identification.

When is she black?

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Indigeneity in its becoming cannot be colonized. The reason is that Indigeneity in becoming is not a state, or a status. It is a field, an opening, an encounter, a way. This way comes with layers of fabulations, with tricksters and relations, with contradictions and, I am told, a hefty sense of humour. I don't seek here to downplay the harm of Pretendians. But I do want to emphasize that the theft does not in fact steal Indigeneity as such. It runs off with the resources, as colonialism has always done. But in so doing, it demonstrates what we already know: the institutions of colonialism will always remain colonial, *let's grab the land* not only their rallying cry, but their mandate. Late-stage capitalism asks for nothing less than to profit from the endtimes. The

only way out will be sideways, unpropertying our attachments, demortgaging our investments.

In the gesture that claims "I am you," I stands as settled. When asked to justify that stance, I startles. It recoils. Because I is its own justification. Its own propertied enclosure.

The stories of Pretendians are both neverending, and seem to never add up. Despite their best efforts, they are outside the count, beyond the ledger. That's not surprising. Whiteness never had to stand back to be counted, never had to get special status to be recognized on the tiny parcel of land that should never have had to be reserved. And so it never learned to keep its story straight.

The irony is that, in recognizing that things don't add up, it is to whiteness that Pretendians turn to explain themselves, to make sense of things, to convince you and themselves that they are owed their due. Because *they've done so much!* And that's also often true. Pretendians – especially in the university, have often done excellent work, and often have also established good working relations with First Nations communities that, to some degree at least, welcome them with care and trust.

Doing good work and putting yourself in the driver's seat of other peoples' lives are two things.

If you needed to disguise yourself as Indigenous to do the work, you should wonder at that gesture, and what you hoped to get from it. TallBear is clear: "Race shifters steal our stories to the material and psychic detriment of Indigenous peoples."[101] By posing as Indigenous, Pretendians "who rise through the professional ranks falsely represent our voices. They theorize Indigenous peoplehood, sovereignty, and (anti-)colonialism. They become 'thought-leaders,' institutional decision-makers, and policy advisors to governmental leaders with regulatory and economic power over our peoples and lands. They shape academic and public discourse about who we allegedly are, what our lives allegedly look like, and what they think should be done about and to us. Race-shifters grabbing the mic and taking space has real-life consequences for our well-being."[102] In addition: "Race-shifters who did not face the disadvantages and barriers of being Indigenous skew statistical data on Indigenous well-being, making us look wealthier and healthier than we are. This risks de-prioritization and effectiveness of public policy that

101 https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/native-identity-fraud-is-not-distraction.

102 https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/native-identity-fraud-is-not-distraction.

targets Indigenous education, economic, and health outcomes."[103]

The list of harms is as long as settler colonialism, shaded, always, by the afterlife of slavery.

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I wake up to more ancestors. I have just a few vouchers left. Five celebrities and royalty will cost me one hundred vouchers. The burial and birth certificates are just one voucher each. I have been fooled by celebrities before, so I hold back. There's no good reason, I suppose. I will end up spending the vouchers one way or another, and I don't expect any revelations at this point. But today, I don't bite.

The truth is I've lost interest in the tree. What I sit with is the gesture that led me to the website in the first place. What was I really looking for?

There is something about the more-than human that has been lingering in the background of the genealogical search. Because isn't that precisely what Pretendians are after, that mythical quality that might give them a way to refuse their world, their whiteness, to travel in more ancient times when the colonizing hadn't

103 Idem.

yet had such violent effects, where the emphasis on *all our relations* provides access to the nonhuman world in ways sorely lacking in capitalist endtimes? Isn't that what we are all after, those of us who face the burning of the planet with dread every morning upon waking up?

In the university, I travel in circles that recognize the capaciousness of the more-than human, critical of humanism and its extractive habits, its self-centring, its *self*. But up north, in the area of Sainte-Anne-du-Lac, these are not the kinds of conversations I have. Here, where most people make their living in the extractive industries, hierarchies lurk, the human generally at the helm. It's a hunting and fishing area, after all, and not at all uncommon, at the end of the yearly fall hunt, for the antlered moose to be pictured with the ebullient extended family in a semi-circle. And, coming from a household where amphibian ecologies are celebrated, the hatred of beavers remains an affront, despite those dedicated beavers making the spawning of the trout more challenging. But this doesn't mean that climate change isn't present in everyday encounters. Farmers, lumberjacks – these are people who experience the details of the earth daily, who can tell you when something was

planted last year and ten years ago and when their grandfather was alive, who can speak to when the trees were tapped for maple syrup the year the temperatures just never got warm enough, or how, this year, tapping as we did in February, we are seeing temperatures never imagined before. The earth is lived. That some make a living in the extractive industries doesn't mean they aren't aware, or sensitized, to the planet's demise.[104] They just tend to be too busy to say much about it.

R. is different. He talks about it, takes a handful of earth and shows me that its texture has changed due to the uncommonly hot weather, asks me to stand under the crabapple tree and listen, demonstrating how few bees there are. When winter just doesn't properly arrive this year, he stands with me in front of his house and shows me, on the hills across the road, which maples won't survive, not just because it didn't get cold enough, but because the summer was too hot, and too dry. He feels it, and it terrifies him.

Here, in R.'s world, everyone is someone's cousin and everyone knows each other's business. I glean things from others. His was the poorest family in

104 See Erin Manning, *Out of the Clear* (Colchester / New York / Port Watson: minor compositions, 2022).

town, the kids who kept to themselves, never playing in the sports teams that came together daily after school. He and his siblings were always too busy on the farm, especially after their father's accident. Every time his mother comes up, I do notice a lightness in the air, though. It was her way with animals, with children, with plants. But somewhere along the way, it seems R. got lost. No one says anything specific. But the feeling is that he simply fell off the edge, into alcohol and drugs. From him I have learned of years spent in ad hoc accommodations – cars, tents. But also of long winters in northern Québec cutting down trees. When he tells me of the lumber industry, there are tears in his eyes. And anger: all those trees replanted, such a waste! Why didn't they just leave the trees to reseed themselves? They weren't going to properly tend the seedlings anyway.

In time, R. found his way back to the house where he grew up. He mostly kept to himself, considered shy and self-effacing by others in the village. There was the terrible nickname – "minus." We are still working our way out of that – it takes a lifetime to survive the pain of having been underestimated, downtrodden, and given up on.

When R.'s mother died and his siblings came to steal what should have gone to him, he was

alone in facing them. For that he has not forgiven his neighbours.

I suppose what I wanted, when I started the genealogy, was to give him the gift of the more-than. I wanted to find a way to decouple him from his family (by, paradoxically, finding another family amongst his ancestors). It all feels quite off now, especially when I realize that "finding" his genealogy would have meant that the siblings who continue to degrade him would also have access to that more-than, if that's what Indigeneity brings.

Perhaps it's an odd thing to want to provide someone with a line of flight, but sometimes life is just so hard that having another story might make it livable. My mistake was to think a website could do this. That the more-than could be ascertained, packaged, exchanged. This is the danger of the more-than human – that you could believe, in the glory of whiteness, that it was yours to bestow.

At the same time, the fabulation has done its trick, propelling us into new vistas, allowing us to have conversations about his mother and her father that didn't open the door to the violent memories of his family unit. Now, when we sit together, we can talk about the other Joseph

Lepine, the Métis in Red River Manitoba, who shares his name and almost his birthdate with R.'s great-grandfather, who lived at another Rivière-Rouge. And we can talk about those white pines that have become so sparse in the area, and about the early years of R.'s working in the north when he would still find some of those metre-wide trees. We know of one or two on our land, and we plan to visit them. When we drive together toward Montréal, he points them out to us on the distant ridges, the few that are left. We didn't need the genealogy to get us here. We just needed the time together to sit in the adjacency of lineage, in "all our relations."

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Children are fabulators. "When I was your mother." "As a cat." The child is not becoming *a* mother in the fabulation, or *a* cat, the child is moving into the esqueness of cat, becoming cat-esque, or mother-esque, as Brian Massumi might say. Often channeled through play, the child is connecting to "[w]hat is excessive in the situation, its charging with intensity" (2014, 10). This quality, the more-than of any static sense of identity, unsettles the field, exposing it to what Massumi

calls its "surplus-value of life" (10). This is not a pretending. Pretending requires that a settling be assumed, that the child locate themselves outside the play, that there be a strong sense of self to be grafted onto. Fabulation in childplay moves into the vivacity of animation's surplus, connecting to a tendency, already at work in the surrounds, that is "irreducibly qualitative, actively flush with the living" (2014, 10).

If you ask a child if they are *a* cat, the child will likely make a sound. Meeeeeeow. The adult might take that as a yes. But the child knows better. They are not *a* cat. They are *catting*. There is no before-after in this scenario, no child on one end and cat on the other. Cat has taken child into play.

This may only last a few minutes. Children are as known for their attunement to the esqueness of the world as they are for their quick transitions. Cat is not an identity they have merged with. It is a force-of-form that has metamorphosed them in play, for the time it took. From there – who knows. The path is not pre-drawn.

Massumi suggests that this intensive metamorphosis – intensive in the sense of qualitative – carries what Raymond Ruyer calls the activity's aesthetic yield (1958, 142, in Massumi 201, 10). "The aesthetic yield is the qualitative excess of

an act lived purely for its own sake, as a value in itself, over and against any function the act might also fulfill" (10). The turn toward other intensities is quick because of the attunement to the aesthetic yield of the relational field. Cat-esqueness may just not be viable when the dragons arrive.

The excess the child intuitively connects to is not to be reasoned away. *But you are not a cat!* will never work. This isn't up for negotiation. The adult just doesn't understand. There is no reasoning on that plane where fabulation takes over the event and the bodying cats. School will alter this, will dampen the esqueness, in lieu of training the child into more reasonable forms of expression. Before too long the child will stop meowing, will *know* they are not, actually, a cat. The surplus of vivacity will be muted. This is how children are trained into neurotypicality.

When a Pretendian enters an institution, they lead with the shield of neurotypicality, "perform[ing] to expectations of what an Indigenous person should be… [offering] a non-threatening version of Indigeneity that serve[s] the institution" (Cyca 2023).[105] The "Indigenous position"

105 Michelle Cyca. "What is the Point of 'Pretendian' Investigations?" November, 2023. https://thewalrus.

that will uphold the colonial university's path to excellence does not invite paraterranean entryways. Neurotypicality, it bears repeating, is not a person. It is the way whiteness organizes itself in the arena of propertied modes of knowing and the evaluatory matrixes they condone. And so the Pretendians coming in must also be pretenders in that regard: they must be well-schooled in the normative requirements of neurotypicality, which is to say, normopathy. Whiteness. Their success depends on it: they must know better than to expose the esqueness of the world's surplus-value of life. They must know how to toe the systemic line of neurotypicality, giving it just enough edge to make it Indigenous. Indigeneity must be tactically constrained, held to the confines of the reasonable, the predictable, the schooled.

Neurodiversity threatens the colonial institution by refusing to mute the pull of esqueness – including that inability to draw a firm border between body and world – upsetting the normative segregating-out the politics of respectability requires. It's not that autistic perception – that perceptual fielding that directly connects to relations in-forming – is incapable of recognizing category, or of engaging frames, but that

ca/pretendian-investigations/.

this edging-into-itself of perception catches other tendencies in the un-parsing that unsettle the propriety of those propertied enclosures the university values most.[106] To bring diversity into the university in the name of EDI is never about dislodging that normative framework: the university requires it to be able to stand firm on what it recognizes as knowledge, and value.

Neurodiversity here is not reducible to diagnosis, and shouldn't be understood as pathology. It is the emphatic counterpoint to normopathy, not something that happens in the brain as though the brain and the body lived separate lives. If neurodiversity is the name given to the uneasy schizz that unsettles whiteness it is not because it runs counter to it, as though in a binary, but because it moves in another logic altogether.[107] Neurotypicality is whiteness. Neurotypicality, understood this way, can never be reduced to a

106 For an account of a neurodiverse, Indigenous student facing these very issues in the university context, see "Me Lo Dijo Un Pajarito," in Erin Manning, *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

107 See the preface of Erin Manning, *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020) for an account of the logic of "approximation of proximity" in relation to the uneasy pairing of neurodiversity and black life.

person. It is a systemic orientation to the question of knowing, and bodying. To learn to pass, to live it frontally, is a requirement for success in the academic institution. Without it, without the scarcity model propriety upholds in its commitment to competitiveness and exclusion, there is no bar to hold onto, no gauge to secure that only the best get in.

Indigeneity has to stay vague in order to do the work of neurotypicality. It has to be a generalized construct.[108] Because, to be clear: Indigeneity cannot be neurotypical. By this I don't mean that a single individual cannot act in a neurotypical way. I mean that normopathy as baseline for existence is not given to Indigeneity. Indigeneity simply is not calibrated in that way. Indigeneity is always the excess on that normative presupposition, which is to say, its countercurrent. I have made a similar argument around blackness, with the caveat that to consider this in all its tentacular reach, another logic – one of approximation of proximity – has to be mobilized.[109] Normopathy

108 See TallBear on the problem of the term "Indigenous" and how it connects to the placeholder "identity." https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/kim-TallBear-comments-on-Indigenous.

109 See Erin Manning, *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

is white, can only be white. It is a colonial stance that metes out existence to settle it in its image. For the university to continue to function as the colonial institution it is, normopathy must remain its baseline. A few sprinkles of blackness and Indigeneity, disability and racialization, yes, but *its logic has to remain white*. Pretendians fit the bill. By spicing up normativity with an edge of Indigeneity, they uphold the personality of respectability the institution depends on, a respectability that tames Indigeneity, that mutes the relational weave of its autistic perception.

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From what I can glean, Sainte-Anne-du-Lac seems to have been a place for hunting and fishing for several Indigenous peoples. Two groups are closely associated to the area. The village is part of their unceded territory.[110] There are also

110 In conversation with the Atikamekh nation in Manawan, Québec, it has been confirmed that the land where 3E is situated, 7 kilometres to the west of the village of Sainte-Anne-du-Lac, is also Atikamekh unceded land. It took years to receive this confirmation because the borders of unceded land are not made publicly available, for the most part. In 2025 hereditary chiefs from several nations (Innu, Atikamekh, Anishinaabe) have mobilized in the area to protect

the Weskarini, also known as Algonquins of the Petite Nation or "Quieunontateronons." From what I can puzzle out from sparse resources, they inhabited the lower Ottawa River in present-day Canada, eventually moving up toward Rivière-Rouge and Nominingue. Once the Maniwaki reservation (now known as Kitigan Zibi) was established in 1851,[111] some perhaps also found their way there. In Jean-Guy Paquin's book *Au pays des weskarini — récit,* there is a reprint of a letter from an Indigenous elder to the government of Canada asking that something be done about the reckless lumber industry. This was from the late 19th century, and came from

unceded lands from a law (C-97) that would give industry even more access to timber. Blockades have been set up to block the lumber trucks from entering their territory and hereditary chiefs have been forcing workers to leave their territories. For the blockades of the main points of entry into the northern region, they have called on "allochtones" to join, and 3E has been part of the mobilization.

111 The history of the reserve is closely linked to that of the Town of Maniwaki, which developed concurrently. The reserve, originally called "Manawaki" (after mani aki, meaning Mary's land) and "River Desert," changed its name in 1994 to "Kitigan Zibi" (Kitigàn can be translated from Algonquin as "garden," "cultivated land" or "cleared land."). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kitigan_Zibi.

a small settlement along Rivière-Rouge, in the Laurentians. I suspect it was from a Weskarini, but I can't be certain.

The Weskarini are believed to have migrated from the east sometime in the 16th century, and to have maintained alliances with other Algonquin groups and the Arendahronon (Huron) tribe. But they faced increasing pressure from the Iroquois Confederacy in the 17th century and so sought refuge near Trois-Rivières. The Catholic Church offered protection but only in exchange for converting to Catholicism, which many refused. A major Iroquois offensive in 1652 forced the main band to flee north. Suffering massacres near Mont-Tremblant, the few remaining survivors scattered across various regions, some joining other Algonquin communities or integrating with French settlers.

Today, descendants of the Weskarini are found in various communities across Canada, including the Timiskaming Algonquin band and the Algonquins of Ontario.[112] Local lore around Mont-Laurier, Ferme-Neuve and Sainte-Anne-du-Lac suggest that Weskarini families continued to live in the area. We also know that Nomininge, which is about an hour away, was a sacred site

112 A Gemini AI history of the Weskarini.

and gathering point for several First Nations. It was in Nominingue, in fact, that the Iroquois decimated the Weskarini. The Weskarini are said to have lived on the shores of the Petit Lac Nominingue, the name for which, Onamani, refers to the red clay that was found in the lake (and may also have been the impetus for naming the river Rivière-Rouge).[113]

The most recent census for Mont-Laurier, the closest town to Nominingue, suggests that there are fifteen people living there today who have knowledge of Indigenous languages (no specific language is selected amongst the eighty-four choices), and 675 people who claim Indigenous identity in a population of 13700. Of those who claim Indigenous affiliation, 655 claim single Indigenous ancestry only, the majority of them opting for the category "North American Indian." 140 people claim Métis single ancestry and fifteen claim multiple Indigenous ancestries.[114] None claim Inuit ancestry.

Ancestry is defined by the census as "whether a person has ancestry associated with the Indigenous

113 https://www.ballyhoo.ca/first-nations-history.html.

114 Darryl Leroux notes that the "increase in persons identifying as 'Métis' in Québec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick has far outstripped the increase in those self-identifying as Métis nationally" (2019, 8).

peoples of Canada, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis, and/or Inuit. [...] Ancestry refers to the ethnic or cultural origins of the person's ancestors, an ancestor being usually more distant than a grandparent." Ninety-five people are registered or are "Treaty Indian." Interestingly, in the questions on ethnic and cultural origin, 405 people claim their ethnicity as First Nations (North American Indian) and 235 as Métis. In the section on religion, the rubric "traditional (North American Indigenous) spirituality" shows zero.[115]

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Cyca writes: "As a contributor to the genre of pretendian investigations – someone whose own career has been advanced by one such investigation – I have become increasingly uncomfortable with how these stories reinforce the idea that justice can be reached by discrediting an individual's claims rather than by dismantling the systems and cultural mechanisms that reward and reinforce such deceptions at scale."[116]

115 https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Mont-Laurier&DGUIDlist=2021A00052479088&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0).

116 https://thewalrus.ca/pretendian-investigations/.

The more-than human is often romanticized in a way that recentres whiteness. It's alluring for those who don't have to live without clean drinking water, who have continual access to electricity and are not encumbered by the local realities of extractive industries. Simplified notions of "return" to land, where nature stands in for all that hasn't been denatured by culture, embolden connections to idealized notions of land, and use Indigeneity as an abstract image to revalue their existences. Here, the Indigenous is deployed as the direct pathway to all that departs from the infinite accumulation of capital, from depleted relation to any number of more "direct" or "authentic" ways of living. Indigeneity takes on the tinge of a perfect abstraction: a past unencumbered, with infinite wisdom. To be properly engaged in the more-than human, read Indigenizing, means connecting *back*. But the more-than is not Indigenous. It's not a state that can be returned to. The more-than, the anarchic share of live-living, that esqueness that propulses the event into its artfulness, into its capacity for fabulation, belongs to no one. It is not land, not nature over culture, not tradition. It is emphatically not *the way things were*. The more-than, in the shape of enthusiasm, is what could never be wrested, what doesn't fit into the

coffers of propertied existence, what was never ours or yours.

That many First Nations have been good custodians of the more-than is undisputed. It is unquestionably urgent that we all learn from those ancient traditions that prioritize a poetics of relation, and that we practice unpropertying our existences, be they First Nations of the Americas or from Africa, or anywhere else. There is no question that richness lives in these traditions.

But to do that, we need not be/come Indigenous.

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To address the infiltration of Pretendians, Cyca asks that we refrain from "picking off high-profile examples one by one without addressing the root of the problem," that we stop giving into "the true crime or sensational scam genre rather than journalism that advances reconciliation."[117] Case in point: the Buffy Sainte-Marie 5th Estate program[118] plays fast and easy with entertainment tropes that are incapable of engaging with the complexity of the very question of claim not least because they don't take the time to engage

117 https://thewalrus.ca/pretendian-investigations/.
118 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMsqCWNCUc4.

with the Piapot issue – the fact that Sainte-Marie continues to be claimed by a people who recognize her as their own. Cyca: "It can be true that Buffy Sainte-Marie is part of the Indigenous community by adoption and not by blood; in fact, recognizing Indigenous sovereignty requires us to learn to distinguish between the two. This does not make her history irrelevant, nor does it negate the painful likelihood that she cultivated a decades-long deception, appropriating a very real and widespread experience of Indigenous trauma to burnish her claims. Instead, the two truths must sit uncomfortably beside each other. We cannot use her impact and relationships to excuse her lies, nor can we say that those lies negate her citizenship in Piapot."[119]

Cree author Michelle Good reflects on this paradoxical situation, reminiscing about being in a concert with "Buffy going wild, with her amazing music and her amazing presentation". Says Good: "your feeling was real. That was real. You don't have to give up that feeling that you had, you don't have to give up your admiration for the talent, and for the encouragement that she gave Indigenous people…."[120]

119 https://thewalrus.ca/pretendian-investigations/.
120 Idem.

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The feeling is real. That's the force of fabulation, that it connects to that zone of intensity where aesthetic yield opens up compossibilities. We need not become anything, arrive at anything, to go there. Becoming is not an endpoint, not the last word, not the state things take. It is simply the conduit for the esqueness through which new worldings can body.

To despair about whiteness is a good thing. But to dismantle it we need to sidestep category. This includes identity, and any idea of self-revelation, including idealizing the more-than human, if that turn toward the more-than does little more than settle us in a newly propertied environment that claims, too often from a residually humanist perspective, a direct connection to trees or plants or animals à la Indigenous.

When we delve into the more-than human, those of us who sidle whiteness, we have to be careful that it isn't another extractive tendency. We have to watch that we are not chunking worlds into new hierarchies, suddenly privileging natures that are more primitive than cultures. We must attend to the ways in which our whiteness allows us, historically, to remain the settlers

of those 100 Acres protected by those missionary-priests whose work is to keep the propertying in line. The answer is not to become a victim of our whiteness, as though it were itself a fact. Sidestepping our-selves requires daily work to learn how else to encounter the knot of paradox, that uneasy unsettled sense of not occupying the centre, of it ultimately not being about *us*.

Whiteness is practiced, systemically, each time the settling happens. Becoming attuned to how life is propertied, to how knowledge is policed or weaponized, is the first step. But it's not enough. We can't reactivate the force of relation by settling ourselves where that hardest work has been done, at great cost, by the disenfranchised. That's too easy. Instead, we must recognize how neurotypicality does its work through us, how it has opened doors and cleared paths we didn't even know we had remade in our image. And from there, we have to learn to do the paraterranean dance, the sideways shuffle that detours the frontality of normopathy.[121] In the middling of its sideways movements, we might still lose our way on websites that sell us ancestors, but

121 On the paraterranean, see "The Paraterranean: A Becoming-Black," Bayo Akomolafe, 2023. https://library.biotoopia.ee/the-paraterranean-a-becoming-black-bayo-akomolafe-69c55c06645c.

hopefully, by then, we have learned to laugh at our-selves. Then we can truly begin the dance of feeling-into the difference between myth-making and fabulation and stop pretending.

When we become better fabulators, when the sheer joy of play returns, we will stop being the centre of our accounts of the world. In the laughter, we will lose some of the piousness so many of us have come to carry, terribly afraid of making a wrong step and being called out for it. And we will remember what we like to forget: truly, it's never been about us.

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In the surplus of vivacity of the aesthetic yield, life sparks. At this ontopoetic juncture, there is no fixed identity: no child, no cat. There is ludic gesture, devious detouring. A cat-esque apparition. A hissing, perhaps. And then laughter. The child is a magician of abstraction, their mode of existence truly process-philosophical. Speculative pragmatism abounds: how things fit together matters, but not more than what else they can do. The world is alive with qualities at the ready, the child the cobbler of tendencies. A bit of this and a lot of that make for a new game, rules changed on the fly.

In the aftermath of the play, cat-esqueness now forgotten, what remains is an atmosphere of invention. The child doesn't go in and out of role, as though this were a theatre performance. Given the opportunity, the child glides into the esqueness of the atmosphere still schizzing with potential, using the momentum of the abstraction to generate the next one, riding the wave. This aesthetic gesture connects to the artfulness of the world, enlivening the surrounds.

It is only later, once she has started school and learned to take tests, once she begins to bring home report cards, downcast at the judgement they carry, that she will tell you that she doesn't draw well. By that time, she will have other things to say as well about who she is. Statements that begin with "I am" but don't end with "cat" will become more habitual. This is where things begin to stall, and where a certain settling begins to take hold. Soon, the world will be more and more depleted, its lively edges muted, the everyday taken over by the neurotypical frame she will be taught to adhere to. She won't know it's neurotypical because, well, it's just what it is. She will learn that to pay attention means to stop daydreaming, that to draw well means to represent the world, that to be smart

means to be able to reduce complexity into legibility. By now she will have stopped drawing, certain that she is no longer good at it. But in her quiet moments she will perhaps wonder for whom the world is made legible, feeling the spark of all that still, tentatively, refuses parsing. She will learn to keep it to herself.

Some of us will never pass as neurotypical. *We will never be considered fully human*. Because neurotypicality polices those categories that define the human, producing them in the image of the ongoing colonialism humanism upholds. We will be judged according to how well we embody the ideal, modelled as much around the superficial shape our presence takes as the way we carry it, and are carried by it.[122] We will be expected, from early childhood on, to perform the executive functions that performs us. We will be expected to follow rules, and especially to follow them in the order they were given. This will begin by learning to tie our shoes, a task that relies on that one-after-another sequence we will be expected to master. We will learn impulse control and benefit from being disciplined. We will know that a

122 An interesting read: Jean L. Briggs, *Inuit Morality Play – The Emotional Education of a Three-Year Old* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

body out of control is an undomesticated body. We will recognize spastic bodies, disorganized bodies, as beyond knowing. We won't question it when we are told that Down's syndrome is a threat to humanity that should be aborted. We will believe it when we are told that some folks, *those folks*, are just lazy. That they don't want to learn. They don't want to work. They don't want to *contribute*. Soon, we will understand that there is a share of existence that cannot be properly domesticated. And we will know, below the threshold of consciousness, that these, the undomesticatable, are threats. We will reconcile ourselves to the vocabulary of the burden, will recognize that success requires individualized notions of independence. We will not have to be told who these people are who have failed to meet the propertied requirements on existence. It will be easy to discern this truth in the histories we are taught, and in the values we take on as ours. As we move through our education, we will practice this every time we evaluate the other based on how legible their intelligence is to us. We will move through the world in a belief of our right to mortgage it. We will say it's not our white skin that gives us this privilege, or our able body. We will say *we worked hard*. We will believe

we deserved it. We will adhere to the narrative of settling that has been our right of passage (even as we keep those land acknowledgements on our email signatures). We will believe in personal inheritance, in the insurance of credit. If we go into debt we will believe we are worthy of it, that we can get ahead of it. And when we hit a wall and wonder what the use of it all is, where the value is, we will blame that other who has not properly propertied their existence, we will become resentful of the taxes we pay and the social web we are forced to pay into. We will find tax breaks, will refuse to declare our full income, we will hide our money. We will continue, in whatever way we can, to grab the land. We will be white, we will keep on living white.

The surplus-value of life, the more-than of life-living, life moved by the being of relation, deviates whiteness. It can't claim or be claimed. It is interstice, associated milieu. In its movement, in the aesthetics of the earth, it is not a given. It is a practice. This practice must be tended to. In an ethos of the poetics of relation, Indigenous communities have given this quality of existence value by practicing it. To practice the more-than is not to extract it, but to value all that grows in its midst, and contribute to that growth.

The tendency to appropriate comes with settling. If you've learned that everything can be yours, if you've read the pamphlet that promises land for paltry investment, if you've bought into the idea that it's "empty," just waiting for you to claim it, then you might think that you can borrow some of that Indigeneity too. But Indigeneity claimed this way is simply a category, an empty generalization. Indigeneity, taken out of context, is just whiteness, janus-faced.

Centring the collective in a spirit of relation means learning to connect with the entangled folds of nonlinear histories unsettled by colonial time. Experimenting here is not about grand gestures. It is not about proving our value in a ledger that has already been written by the institutions that give value to our segregated, colonial notions of identity. What is at stake is much more quotidian – checking in long enough that life feels livable again; weeding so that the garden, momentarily forgotten, becomes a lure again; showing up to stack the wood after a long day to bring in just enough for the night, or maybe a bit more; sharing a meal; reading a poem; taking out the garbage; loving.

These are minor gestures not because they are small, or local, but because they carry capacity

beyond themselves to nurture movements that can take us where we didn't anticipate going. Minor gestures allow life-living to leak in, life buoyed by enthusiasms as yet unshaped. In the midst of these minor variations on existence, fabulations abound, including the creation of new ways of becoming-family.

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It's a surprisingly cold weekend after an unusually warm winter. It has felt terrifying, this warmth. Only two or three nights under minus twenty degrees, and many days close to zero. This shouldn't be happening up north.

The three of us sit together, B. and R. and I. Sometimes when R. speaks, B. doesn't quite understand. It's a mixture of the local Québécois dialect and R.'s unusual way of revving up a sentence from the middle without quite following through. Sometimes, afterwards, I recount the conversation so that he can catch what he missed. But today the words are not so important, our conviviality nurtured in the feel of our being together, around a cup of coffee, on a cold afternoon.

We are talking about the spring, anxious to start the seedlings for the gardens. It's something

to do in late February – an attempt to sidle spring. It will be many months before spring arrives, but with the talk of tomatoes we can almost taste those longer days.

We will plant forty-three kinds of tomatoes this year. R. laughs. He will take care of planting the seedlings at his house. It's better set up for that kind of thing there. And since he's been unwell, it's been hard for him to get out of the house as much, so this will give him something to do.

As we sort out the determinate and the indeterminate tomato seeds, and laugh at the excess (that's on me), we go in and out of a conversation about the genealogy. He speaks with disdain, for the first time, of people telling him he should get "his cards." He's never mentioned this to me before. It turns out many people in Sainte-Anne-du-Lac have their memberships. It gives them access to tax breaks, and hunting and fishing rights.

He's angry. They don't even need it, he says.

We sit quietly for a while. He's the only local I know who doesn't hunt. He would if he needed meat, but he prefers to raise a pig every once in a while than to kill a wild animal on his land. He's not against hunting, exactly. He just doesn't really see the use of it when you can get a box of

food from the next town over every Thursday for $20/month.

It's not even our land, he says, again.

He never stays long, uncomfortable in sociality, as is often the case with neurodiversity. We do well together in our paraterranean sidling – minor sociality, as I like to call it. But that doesn't happen around the table. It happens outside, in the gardens, or canning, or baking. Side by side, allowing the movements to direct us.

Weeks pass. We don't talk much about the genealogy anymore. I may take the time to draw it out on a large piece of cardboard to replace the one that was stolen by his siblings. He does love how far back it goes, and all of its forks. We all emerge from a journey. But he knows, now, how invested that journey was in the colonizing of these lands, and I can tell that feels heavy.

When his siblings come up in conversation, as they often do, it's still with insurmountable pain. I tell him that they don't deserve so much attention – I worry about his heart, broken not only by them but by the hard living he's done. But every tinge of deception brings him back to them, and the pain of having been treated as "minus." Despite the violence of having been deceived by them, of having been belittled, I imagine he feels at a loss,

alone, without the environment family promises. He grew up in a big family, after all, working the farm, sharing a room with many siblings. I can imagine how tight it was because he still lives in that same house, two rooms downstairs and four small bedrooms upstairs, two kids per room, one with three. Today, the upstairs rooms are closed off in the winter to save on heating. Still, his house is cold. He's learned to burn carefully to make sure he has enough wood to get through the winter.

I can't fill the hole of the lost family. I wish I could. But we can make a world together, with B., with our crazy tomato gardens far too far north to be viable, with our unpropertied dreams.

Fais-en bon usage.

Afterthoughts

In December 2024, Brian Massumi and I took the first legal steps toward taking the land we've purchased as part of the 3Ecologies Project out of private ownership and, in essence, giving it back to itself. As the new year looms, we are preparing to legally begin tending the commons. The 3Ecologies Project, now in its 4th year, has been moving toward this day since we purchased the 100 Acres in 2021. Not all of the land will be given back to itself – we will keep a few acres around our house. But most of it will soon no longer be ours, and more of it will follow once the mortgage on one of the project's houses is paid off.

Tending the commons is one way of saying it. But is it a commons?

Land in Québec that isn't leveraged by the property market is either "Crown land" or "Indigenous land" – Indigenous land for the most part are bracketed "reserves," which is to say, land reserved by the federal government for occupancy

by a First Nations Group.[123] Indigenous land, it should be clear, is *all* land, unbracketed. But in the current propertied market, it makes up 1.3% of land in Québec.

Crown land, according to the Canadian Encyclopedia, is sometimes also called "public land" – though it is noteworthy that it is rarely described that way, at least here in Québec. While Crown Land is land owned by the federal or provincial governments, "authority for control of these public lands rests with the Crown, hence their name."[124] This land, held by colonial authority, makes up 89% of land in Canada.[125]

Crown Land covers over 90% of Québec. One

123 "There are 30 reserves in Quebec, [...] as well as 14 Inuit, 9 Cree and 1 Naskapi community whose lands fall under the jurisdiction of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and Northeastern Quebec Agreement. Five First Nations in Quebec do not have reserve lands: Long Point First Nation, Communauté anicinape de Kitcisakik, Wolf Lake First Nation, Montagnais de Pakua Shipi, Nation MicMac de Gespeg, 'the largest number of First Natiuons without reservation land of any province.' The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne has a reserve that is partly in Quebec, Ontario and New York Sate." https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/reserves-in-quebec#:~:text=.

124 https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/crown-land#:~:text=.

125 Idem.

of the main ways Crown land is administered in Québec is the ZEC – "zone d'exploitation contrôlée" (controlled harvesting zone), lauded by Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal in their book *Free Market Environmentalism* as "instrumental in maintaining high quality recreation."[126] These territories are charged with managing hunting and fishing (previously overseen by private clubs, with widespread poaching). ZECs are self-sustaining, and "managers are incentivized to protect the flora and fauna of the area as a future revenue stream."[127] In addition to the ZECs, Crown land includes conservation and protection territories such as national parks that are managed and regulated by specific agencies, which the government itself names "*so-called* free territory" (my emphasis).[128]

126 ZECs were created in 1978 as non-profit organizations in charge of managing wildlife resources. They are marketplaces managed by supervisors elected by paying members. https://perc.org/2012/06/29/what-in-the-world-is-a-zec/.

127 https://perc.org/2012/06/29/what-in-the-world-is-a-zec/.

128 "If structured portions such as wildlife territories (ZECs, wildlife reserves, outfitters with exclusive rights, wildlife refuges, etc.) and conservation and protection territories such as national parks are managed and regulated by specific agencies, the portions of *so-called free territory* are the direct responsibility of

Fishing, hunting and trapping are allowed, with permits, and camping is possible as long as encampments are temporary and collapsible. But it should be underscored: forests serve private extractive interests. No pretense is made by the government that *so-called* "public" land is a commons. The "public" land remains transactional – it depends on the market. Timber extraction continues at unsustainable rates, as well as ongoing mining and hydro projects,[129] many of

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the government or a delegated RCM." (my emphasis). https://www.quebec.ca/en/tourism-and-recreation/sporting-and-outdoor-activities/activities-permitted-public-land.

129 For an account of Old Nemaska and the Cree experience of having to relocate due to the flooding of their lands by Hydro Québec, see George Wapachee and Susan Marshall *Going Home – The Untold Story of Nemaska Eenouch.* Cree Nation of Nemaska, 2002. On mining: in February, 2024, the Mitchikanibikok Inik took the Québec government to court for the way the government has been granting mining claims and allowing exploration activities in their territories without consultation or accommodation. https://ecojustice.ca/news/first-nation-challenges-quebecs-free-entry-mining-regime-in-court/.

New rules resulted from the ruling that obliged exploration companies to consult Indigenous communities, including cleaning up abandoned exploration camps. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/cree-exploration-mining-reform-indigenous-land-rights-1.7325031.

them destroying Indigenous lands. While true that the land is not generally open to development, it remains possible to purchase or lease Crown land. Decisions for new sales or leases are based on priorities for land use and project development. Currently, the two priorities are recreation/tourist development and the implementation of wind turbines.[130]

Québec's forestry sector is the largest in Canada, home to 2% of the world's cover.[131] Rampant deforestation occurs in the border zone between the mixed forest and the boreal forest. The 3Ecologies Project sits at this border, at the limit of Québec's southern infrastructure: north and north-east of 3E, there are only dirt roads. Our 100 Acres border Crown land, which continues for thousands of kilometres. Everywhere along the roads leading north, in these so-called "public lands," vast swathes of cut tree trunks and low-lying brambles are visible through a line of spindly trees – that curtain wall of fir trees a tactic to obfuscate the ongoing destruction of our northern ecologies.

130 https://www.quebec.ca/en/agriculture-environment-and-natural-resources/occupation-of-public-land/management-of-public-land.

131 https://www.canadaaction.ca/quebec-forestry-sector-statistics.

R. was a lumberjack before becoming disabled by an aortic dissection. Like many in the area, it was common for him to take contracts in the far north for weeks or months at a time, where he would accompany the monstrous feller buncher, its large mechanical arms plucking the trees as though they were twigs, his job to mark trees for felling, then to top and prune the downed trees so the skidder can load them onto the truck.

R. knows, more intimately than most, the greed that feeds our ecological impasse. The violence of this clear-cutting has left indelible effects on him, turning him away from the industry. The pain of his complicity in the extractive lumber economy inevitably comes up when we walk the forest together, having to use his chainsaw to cut a trunk because it's fallen on one of the mapleing lines in our rare old-growth forest, or when we have to take trees down because they are shielding the solar panels.

As a major driver of the Québec and the Canadian economy,[132] the lumber industry touches most people around Sainte-Anne-du-Lac. Some drive the skidders and the feller bunchers, some, like

132 https://www.woodworkingnetwork.com/events-contests/salon-industriel-du-bois-ouvre/quebecs-wood-industry-numbers.

R., are lumberjacks (a dying trade), many drive the lumber trucks or work on the machinery that clears roads through the forest and ploughs snow. Many also work the wood on the other end: sawing and splitting it for the firewood most of us need (we burn forty cords/year). None of us are innocent – we expect lumber to be available when we want it for the next building project, and burn the wood often without a second thought to the extractive economy. Some of us with trees on our own land can saw it ourselves, as we do, and cut and split it to burn onsite, but even then, it takes work to move beyond a logic of clearing.[133]

A commons is defined by the OED as "land or resources belonging to or affecting the whole of a community." When R. feels the weight of the forest's disappearance, when he speaks to me of those old (now almost extinct) enormous white pines, when he talks of the anguish in witnessing the machinery pluck the trees, throwing aside the ones that are not marketable (those dreaded firs), it is the affective force of a perceived commons that is speaking through him, I think. A commons, perhaps, less site than way: an *affective path*.

133 For more on the question of clearing and its relationship to settler colonialism (as I see it), see Erin Manning *Out of the Clear* (Colchester / New York / Port Watson: minor compositions, 2022).

"Crown land" and "Indigenous land" are as wide apart as two modes of existence could be. "When Indigenous folks speak of their relationship to land we don't usually do so in an exclusionary sense. Our claims to land and conceptions of nationhood are not based on an understanding of land that is something to be exploited or hoarded to the exclusion of others. Land is a relationship based on the obligations we have to other people and the other-than-human relations that constitute the land itself" (Coulthard 2015).[134] There are likely as many "Indigenous" definitions of land as there are peoples, but certain similarities across First Nations are notable: land is most typically defined as an array of ecosystems that include the social, the spiritual, the environmental, the economic, the legal and the philosophical. Land is relational, transversal. Where "Crown land" remains mired in the transactional aspect of the definition of a commons, "land or resources *belonging* to…," "Indigenous land" amplifies the affective angle: "*affecting* a whole community." Land is a living force to be tended, and respected.

134 Glen Coulthard and Harsha Walia "'Land is a Relationship': In Conversation with Glen Coulthard on Indigenous Nationhood" in *rabble.ca*. January, 2015. https://rabble.ca/columnists/land-relationship-conversation-glen-coulthard-on-indigenous-nationhood/.

"We see the elements of the natural environment – the plants, the animals, the rocks, everything in the natural environment – as a relation of ours. […] We don't exist independently. [I]t's this whole complex set of reciprocities that must be respected" (Alfred 2023, 258; my emphasis).[135]

In a piece entitled "Land as Social Relationship," Mike Gouldhawke writes that it is oversimplifying to speak simply of *who* owns the land. "It's about *how* the land is owned" (my emphasis).[136]

When R. walks through the forest, he paths the *how*. It's in the way he glimpses the shifting vista and feels into its subtle transformations. It's how he touches the dry earth, worrying out loud that the parched summer soil will affect the maples next sugaring-off. It's the angle of his head when he points to the chaga affixed to the birch (that I have to walk closer to see at all), casually mentioning its value in the marketplace of extractivism (one of the ways he has made ends meet in the past). It's how he runs his hand absentmindedly through a budding blueberry

135 Taiaiake Alfred, *It's All About The Land* (Toronto: Aevo University of Toronto Press, 2023).

136 Mike Gouldhawke, "Land as a social Relationship," Briarpatch Magazine, Sept 10, 2020. https://briarpatch-magazine.com/articles/view/land-as-a-social-relationship.

plant, not particularly carefully, but also tenderly, while remarking on the decimation of the fur forest by the encroaching spruce budworm, turning our fir trees bright red in July (those blueberries thrive in the clear cut areas, enjoying the acidic soil and the increased sunlight). It's his childlike laugh when he gets on his knees and pretends he will find wild garlic (it's too late in the season already), wanting to remind me of how unpredictable climate change has made the harvest (and trick me into admitting what a novice I still am). It's the care he takes in being-alongside all that is vying for expression while pointing toward those tiny maple saplings beginning to thrive now that we've opened up the light, having taken down the spruces. Nothing is static in this how, and there is never a sense of his being an outside observer. He walks the shape of an always reconfiguring ecology, awed by the force of life that moves through it.

But, often, these days, it's hard to get him out. He feels the world's end, its ecologies destroyed by greed and rampant denial. And he has lost the verve – his energy radically depleted by illness and depression.

How is in movement. It is *of* a place but not bounded by it. It is *with*.

Kim TallBear writes of being increasingly uncomfortable with the concept of "Indigeneity."[137] Indigeneity, TallBear argues, "promiscuously deployed, draws attention away from ideas of collectivity and belonging to First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and tribal communities." The problem, as TallBear clearly articulates through her work, is that tendency to want to *settle the how* by giving in to a general category.

Settling the how, turning Indigeneity into a static image of itself, returns Indigeneity, on the one hand, to the figure of the noble savage (the one whose knowledge is revered so long as we keep them in the past), and, on the other, into a commodity boldly incorporated into settler imaginaries through the purchase of ancestry. Because no matter whether the claim of "Indigeneity" is made by settlers on the basis of the lure of decolonial purity (the rebuke of whiteness in oneself), or to take financial advantage through fishing and hunting rights, what is being procured are propertied relations. Indigeneity is claimed in the colonial account of how it can count, for how it metes out its value, refreshing, in this way, colonialism's long practice of

137 https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/kim-TallBear-comments-on-indigenous.

settlement. To take (on) Indigeneity as the claim to decolonial promise by making it one's own, by propertying it physically or conceptually, is to extend the violence of settlement while voraciously holding onto the same value-systems, those value-systems complicit in the capitalizing agenda of ongoing colonization, in the afterlives of slavery. In full redface, Indigeneity is reduced to the transaction it always was (and always will be) under settler conditions.

To settle, etymologically, is to sit, "to be comfortably seated." The situatedness of the gesture of laying claim to a territory, the assumption the claim carries, the intention it obfuscates – this is what whiteness does, colonialism its feller buncher.

From its earliest etymology, settle carries a sense of locatedness. It suggests a maintenance of current conditions. Its intention is to remain. In 1175, "to put a person in a seat or place of rest." In 1551, "to present or arrange in order (an argument, the parts of a discourse)." In 1600, "to establish a colony." In 1702, "to colonize a place." In 1867, "to sentence to imprisonment."

Settling shrinks something down to manageable size. "To consolidate" (1611). A mental attitude settles (1586–1756). "To resolve or arrange

matters" (1527). "To arrive at a conclusion" (1602). "To compromise," obsolete (1975).[138]

To settle is always also to accept less-than, to work with the transactional limits of what was already impoverished, bereft of the textures left behind in the shrinking of its potential. To settle is to knowingly decrease the complexity in order to come up on top, to get something of nothing, or nothing much.

Unsettled is a book written in the midst of paradoxes: from a project that seeks to give land back to itself, in a province where the poorest work in the extraction industries, despite their livelihoods depending on the very forests they fell. You can't make this shit up: a close friend told me her father claimed his "Métis" card because since he says the Indigenous own all of Canada, if he wasn't "Métis" he could lose his land.

The book grew of its own accord when troubled by these questions. R. showed me the picture of his grandfather, a beautiful Indigenous-looking man. He wanted to know his ancestry, and I was curious too. And so the quest began and soon I found myself mired in the tangle of contradictions, not least of which was the very

138 https://www.oed.com/dictionary/settle_v?tab=meaning_and_use.

question of my own white skin, and my place within this conversation.

In the months that have ensued, *Unsettled* has proved difficult to place. Polite refusal after polite refusal, what became clear to me was that a normative standard – a settling – around questions of who is doing the asking was at work. Or, said more frontally: for *Unsettled* to circulate I would have to make a case for unsettling-while-white.

A paraontological account of race is not so much a refusal of colonial ontologies as another logic altogether.[139] The para of its becoming is a sidling, an alongside not of staid notions of being (and the metaphysics they prolong) but of a minor sociality that runs through it. Indigeneity under this logic can't be a generalized other of being's prime category, the human (whiteness). Nor can it simply be the it-was, the idealized "before." Indigeneity is a process, a manner that paths its way into land as relation, as transversal quality. Paraontological, it refuses the settling of race into category, into phenotype. It cannot be captured, defined as stable site. This doesn't mean that it has no history, no peoples.

139 For more on the paraontological in relation to logics of mutual inclusion, see Erin Manning *The Being of Relation* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2025).

What it means is that it seeks other logics, other approaches to the question of *how we land*.

Property relations tend to be at the forefront in accounts of where we fit (in). If land is a field of relation, it cannot be said to have a boundary. Any bordered account of land is a result of a colonizing impulse to property relations. As long as propertied relations are foregrounded as private, any account of existence will remain transactional.

A non-transactional logic commons experience by beginning in the transversality of its webbed ecologies. It asks *how*, following an ontogenetic logic, a logic that grows of the lived encounter with geologies of experience.

How unsettles, including unsettling the question of how to map the other of colonization. We've named this other decolonization, and while the necessity of colonialism's other is spoken in part by the concept, the danger is that with continued usage, as the term settles into categories complicit with whiteness, with little attention to the ongoing valuation of private property (despite nice land acknowledgements[140]), we will

140 For an incisive critique of and engagement with land acknowledgements, see Dylan Robinson, Kanonhsyonne Janice C. Hill, Armand Garnet Ruggo, Selena Couture and Lisa Cooke Ravensbergen

remain in a colonial logic. Worse: in the belief that the decolonial is offering us a way, we will pave the path, and tax it.

Making way for other paths is a dizzying proposition, a truly unsettling one. It will come from angles unpresupposed, in unexpected tones. What we call its gestures of inquiry, its modes of existence, will depend on how it grows from the interstices of the relations that co-compose it. What is certain: it will never be one concept, one way.

Whiteness settles. It will never unsettle. Because whiteness is not a person. It's a systemic modality of existence that properties existence at every turn, insisting on the transactional nature of all encounters. It can be (em)bodied, and it is in its most proximal form prolonged and idealized by white-skinned bodies. But if it were just that, reducible to white-skinned people, it would be far less dangerous than the settling that has occurred in its name.

Faced with the unsettling fact that *Unsettled* was written by a white-skinned person, more than one editor suggested that any work on

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"Rethinking the Practice and Performance of Indigenous Land Acknowledgement," in *Canadian Theatre Review* vol. 177, winter, 2019.

decolonization should be left to Native Studies. Unsettling, it seems to me, requires another way of approaching the storying of our difference. Stories, after all, story us into existence, fabulating worlds we then grow ourselves into. They are not "one's own" any more than our biographies have the last word on our becomings.

Unsettling is a dizzying of category. There is no seat for it to sit on, no status quo. It is out of hand, unmoored. Wayward, as Saidiya Hartman might say (2019). Shifting the axis, unsettling undoes us. In that way, it commons us. Not to make us in-common, but to undercommon any tendency to reduce experience to the transactional, to keep it in the staid interpersonal colonial logic of self-other.

To give the land back to itself is to learn how to unbracket existence, how to insecure it, undo it of its logic of (marketable) investment. If that is what it is to tend the (under)commons, if tending the commons is a commitment to engage in the *how* of land's emergent ecologies, its affective force, it is perhaps also a way of honouring a concept of land, a *how,* that is Indigenous.

This *how* is learned through practice, not claims to identity. The settling onto Indigenous lands will not be remedied by a rhetoric of decolonization

that basks in the comfort of mortgaged enclosures.[141] Nor will it be shifted through colonizing claims to ancestry. The *how* of Indigeneity will not be an easy fix, a quick answer to the shame and dread of unsettling-while-white. Tending a commons will be of another order altogether. In the uncertainty of an infinite debt – *we owe each other everything* – in a time of ecological devastation and profound political and cultural uncertainty, in an era of genocide and ongoing wars, tending a commons will be an undercommon act: it will be one way of refusing legacies of market investment and the assurances (insurances) that come with it. It will be one way, one path, toward refusing what still most adamantly holds sway: *me, mine*.

On the 4th of December 2024, it's snowing. The solar panels are covered – no electricity is coming in. We can keep going for four days before we need the generator to top up the batteries. We know from experience that we don't use much

141 Taiaiake Alfred: "We've come to a position now where the Prime Minister himself is up there giving speeches saying that we're a colonial state and we need to reconcile – so now to say that you're decolonizing is nothing. The government has co-opted decolonization. Every university is still controlled by white people, but they say they are decolonizing, so what does it mean. It's language, it's rhetoric, and it means nothing" (2023, 254).

electricity, but the house itself has needs – the fridge, the internet, the battery systems, all of these rely on the sun. Tending a commons includes such concerns, and in the covenant we will leave for the land's ongoing care, we will not shy away from recognizing that there are interdependencies. We will not ignore what the land calls us to be aware of, and what it requires of us. The forests need attending to, especially in these times of ecological degradation, where the soil no longer gets the deep freeze it once did, and we now have much warmer summer temperatures. New species of trees are starting to grow, but how long the maples will continue to thrive is an open question. Last year, forest fires took over northern Québec in a way never seen before, a burned swath of the province that will likely never return to what it once was, given the way the fir trees grow and spread, creating a dominance the slower-growing deciduous species can't combat. Some say we will see large, barren expanses, the earth too poor and the climate too unpredictable to support a return of the diversity of species lost.

To tend a commons, techniques are necessary, including soil and forest regeneration, and sometimes, selective burning. These are techniques

honed over centuries by those who have always seen land as relationship. While our forests also have their own techniques to do this, the climate crisis has shifted time-lines so dramatically as to undermine many of these long-term strategies. Giving land back to itself is to recognize how monocultures take over through ecological devastation, and to learn ways of mitigating the influx of species that can lessen biodiversity. It means refusing a logic of hoarding – land, resources, knowledge. And it means learning with others who feel into the affective layers how else to walk the paths, including those beyond the forest. This is our investment.

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Notes on the Cover

The cover image is a detail of the artwork *100 Acres*.

100 Acres was a 50-yard-long by 5 feet wide (about 40 metres x 1.5 metres) two-sided textile with patterns produced by tufting, sewing and weaving. It snaked up and around throughout the gallery, creating a topology with rhythmic movements winding across the patterns that were conceived as non-representational renderings (transductions) of movements across the 3E land in a refusal of distantism (the belief that the world is given to us in the establishing shot of overview). There was protocol: at the end of exhibition period at Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, people were invited to cut a piece (5 feet by 5 feet) out of the work in return for a 2000-pound contribution to a land fund to enlarge the amount of land under protection as part of

3E: land that, at the time of this writing, is being Unsettled, taken out of the property market and given back to itself.

– Brian Massumi

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